

## Studies in Galatians (5/22)

**Justified by the Faith of Christ.***Galatians 2:6-16*

Our last lesson covered the first ten verses of the second chapter of Galatians, but we did not particularly study the last portion of the section. Accordingly we shall begin our study this week with the sixth verse, in order to keep the connection.

“But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man’s person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Gal. 2:6-16.

**Not in Doubt.**—Paul did not go up to Jerusalem in order to get a difficult point settled. He did not go up to the apostles and elders to find out whether he had been preaching the truth or error for seventeen years. Those who were leaders among the brethren “added nothing” to him. He had seen the Lord Jesus, and he knew whom he had believed (2 Tim. 1:12); and as he had not received the Gospel from any man (Gal. 1:11, 12), he did not need that any man should teach him what it is (1 John 2:26, 27). He went up because the Lord sent him. The Lord knew that the brethren in Jerusalem needed his testimony, and the new converts needed to know that those whom God sent spoke the same thing. They needed the assurance that as they had turned from many gods to the one God, the truth is one, and there is but one Gospel for all men.

**No Monopoly of Truth.**—"Whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me; God accepteth no man's person." There is no man or body of men on earth, that has a monopoly of truth,—a corner, so to speak, so that whoever wishes it must come to him. Truth is independent of men. Truth is of God, for Christ, who is the shining of His glory, and the very impress of His substance (Heb. 1:3), is the truth (John 14:6). Whoever gets the truth, must get it from God, and not from any man, just as Paul received the Gospel. God may and does use men as instruments, or channels, but He alone is the Giver. Every man on earth may be the possessor of just as much of the truth as he is willing to use, and no more. See John 7:17; 12:35, 36. He who would act the pope, thinking to hold a monopoly of the truth, and compel people to come to him for it, dealing it out here, and withholding it there, loses all the truth that he ever had, if he ever really had any. Truth and popery can not exist together; no pope, or man with a popish disposition, has the truth. As soon as a man receives the truth, he ceases to be a pope. If the pope of Rome should get converted, and become a disciple of Christ, that very hour he would vacate the papal seat.

**The Biggest Not Always the Best.**—Just as there is no man who has a monopoly of truth, so there are no places to which men must necessarily go in order to find it. The brethren in Antioch did not need to go to Jerusalem to learn the truth, or to find out if what they had was the genuine article. The fact that truth was first proclaimed in a certain place, does not prove that it can be found only there, or that it can be found there at all. In fact, the last places in the world to go to with the expectation of finding or learning truth, are the cities where the Gospel was preached in the first centuries after Christ, as Jerusalem, Antioch, Rome, Alexandria, etc. Paul did not go up to Jerusalem to them that were apostles before him, but began at once to preach.

The Papacy arose in part in this way: It was assumed that the places where the apostles, or some of them, had preached must have the truth in its purity, and that all men must take it from there. It was also assumed that the people of a city must know more of it than the people in the country or in a village. So, from all bishops being on an equality, as at the beginning, it soon came to pass that the "country bishops" (*chorepiscopi*) were rated as secondary to those who officiated in the cities. Then, when that spirit crept in, of course the next step was necessarily a strife among the city bishops to see which one should be greatest; and the unholy struggle went on until Rome gained the coveted place of power.

But Jesus was born in Bethlehem, a place that was "little among the thousands of Judah" (Micah 5:2), and nearly all His life He lived in Nazareth, a little town of so poor repute that a man in whom there was no guile said, "Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth?" John 1:45-47. Afterward Jesus took up His abode in the wealthy city of Capernaum, but was always known as "Jesus of Nazareth." It is no farther to heaven from the smallest village or even the smallest lonely cabin on the plain, than it is from the largest city,

or bishop's palace. And God, "the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy," dwells with him that is of a contrite and humble spirit. Isa. 57:15.

**It Is God That Works.**—"He that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles." The Word of God is living and active. Heb. 4:12, R.V. Whatever activity there is in the work of the Gospel, if there is any work done, is all of God. Jesus "went about doing good; . . . for God was with Him." Acts 10:38. He Himself said, "I can of Mine own self do nothing." John 5:30. "The Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works." John 15:10. So Peter spoke of Him as "a Man approved of God . . . by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him." Acts 2:22. The disciple is not greater than his Lord. Paul and Barnabas, therefore, at the meeting in Jerusalem, told "what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them." Acts 15:12. Paul declared that he labored to "present every man perfect in Christ Jesus; . . . striving according to His working, which worketh in me mightily." Col. 1:28, 29. This same power it is the privilege of the humblest believer to possess; "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure." Phil. 2:13.

**Recognizing the Gift.**—The brethren in Jerusalem showed their connection with God by recognizing the grace that was given to Paul and Barnabas. When Barnabas first went to Antioch, and saw the grace of God that was working there, he "was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost." Acts 11:21-24. The other apostles perceived that God had chosen Paul for a special work among the Gentiles, and they gave to him the right hand of fellowship, only requesting that he would remember the poor among his own nation, and this he had already shown his willingness to do. Acts 11:27-30. So Paul and Barnabas returned to their work.

**Withstanding Peter.**—"But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed." We need not magnify nor dwell upon the mistakes of Peter or any other good man, because that is not profitable for us; but we must note this overwhelming proof that Peter was never considered the "prince of the apostles," and that he never was, or considered himself to be, pope. Fancy any priest, bishop, or cardinal, withstanding Leo XIII. to the face in a public assembly. He would be considered extremely fortunate if the papal guards allowed him to escape with his life for thus presuming to oppose the "vicar of the Son of God." But Peter made a mistake, and that upon a vital matter of doctrine, because he was not infallible, and meekly accepted the rebuke that Paul gave him, like the sincere, humble Christian that he was. Infallibility is not the portion of any man; and the greatest man in the church of Christ has no lordship over the weakest. "One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren."

**Making a Difference.** “When Peter was at the conference in Jerusalem, he told the facts about the receiving of the Gospel by the Gentiles, at his mouth, saying, “God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as He did unto us; and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” Acts 15:8, 9. God put no difference between Jews and Gentiles in the matter of the purification of the heart, because, knowing the hearts, He knew that “there is no difference; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God,” so that there is no other way than for all to be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.” Rom. 3:22-24. But after having been shown this fact by the Lord; after having preached to the Gentiles and after having witnessed the gift of the Holy Ghost to them, the same as to Jewish believers; after having eaten with them, and faithfully defended his course; after having given a clear testimony in conference that God made no difference between Jews and Gentiles; and even immediately after himself making no difference, Peter suddenly, as soon as some came who he thought would not approve of such freedom, began to make a difference. “He withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.” This was, as Paul says, dissimulation, and was not only wrong in itself, but was calculated to confuse and mislead the disciples.

**Contrary to the Truth of the Gospel.**—A wave of fear seems to have passed over the Jewish believers, for “the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.” This in itself was, of course, not walking “uprightly, according to the truth of the Gospel;” but the mere fact of dissembling was not the whole of the offense against the truth of the Gospel. Under the circumstances it was a public denial of Christ, just as much as that of which Peter had once before, through sudden fear, been guilty. We have all been too often guilty of the same sin to permit us to sit in judgment; we can only note the fact, and the natural consequence, as a warning to ourselves.

See how the action of Peter and the others was a virtual of Christ, altho unintentional. There had just been a great controversy over the question of circumcision. It was a question of justification and salvation,—whether men were saved by faith alone in Christ, or by outward forms. Clear testimony had been borne that salvation is by faith alone, but now, while the controversy is still alive, while the “false brethren” are still propagating their errors, these loyal brethren suddenly discriminated against the Gentile believers, because they were uncircumcised, in effect saying to them, “Except ye be circumcised, ye can not be saved.” Their actions said, “We also are in doubt about the power of faith in Christ alone to save men; we really believe that salvation depends on circumcision and the works of the law.” Such a denial of the truth of the Gospel Paul could not stand, and he at once struck directly at the root of the matter.

**“Sinners of the Gentiles,” and of the Jews.**—“If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.” Paul said to Peter, “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles.” Did he mean that they, being Jews, were, therefore, not sinners?—By no means, for he immediately adds that they had believed on Jesus Christ for justification. They were sinners of the Jews, and not sinners of the Gentiles; but whatever things they had to boast of as Jews, all had to be counted loss for the sake of Christ. Nothing availed them anything except faith in Christ; and since this was so, it was evident that the Gentile sinners could be saved directly by faith in Christ, without going through the dead forms which had been of no service to the Jews.

“This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” 1 Tim. 1:15. “All have sinned,” and stand alike guilty before God; but all, of whatever race or class, can accept this saying, “This Man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them.” A circumcised sinner is no better than an uncircumcised one; a sinner who stands as a church member, is no better than one who is outside. The sinner who has gone through the form of baptism is no better than the sinner who has never made any profession of religion. Sin is sin, and sinners are sinners, whether in the church or out; but, thank God, Christ is the propitiation for our sins, as well as for the sins of the whole world. There is hope for the unfaithful professor of religion, as well as for the one who has never named the name of Christ.

**“Justified.”**—“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, . . . we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified,” says the apostle. The meaning of the word “justified” is made righteous. In an accommodated sense we use the term “justified” of a man who has not done wrong in a thing whereof he is accused. But, strictly speaking, such an one needs no justification, since he is already just; his righteous deed justified him. But since all have sinned, there are none just or righteous before God; therefore they need to be justified, or made righteous, which God does. Now the law of God is righteousness. See Rom. 7:12; 9:30, 31; Ps. 119:172. Therefore Paul did not disparage the law, altho he declared that no man could be made righteous by the law. No; so highly did he appreciate the law, that he believed in Christ for the righteousness which the law demands but can not give. “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh; that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” Rom. 8:3, 4.

**“The Faith of Christ.”**—Much is lost in reading the Scriptures by not noting exactly what they say. Here we have literally, “the faith of Christ,” just as in Rev. 14:12 we have “the faith of Jesus.” He is the Author and Finisher of faith. Heb. 12:2. God has “dealt to every man the measure of faith” (Rom. 12:3), in giving Christ to every man. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God” (Rom. 10:17): and Christ is the Word. All things are of God. It is He who gives repentance and forgiveness of sins.

There is, therefore, no opportunity for any one to plead that his faith is weak. He may not have accepted and made use of the gift, but there is no such thing as “weak faith.” A man may be “weak in faith,” that is, may be afraid to depend on faith, but faith itself is as strong as the Word of God. There is no faith but the faith of Christ; everything else professing to be faith is a spurious article.

Here is comfort. Whoever will accept the faith of Jesus, has that which is as sure to work righteousness in him, and to save him, as the victory of Christ over sin and death is assured. He gives to us His own tried and approved faith. It has not a flaw, and we need not fear to use it; it will not fail us in any contest. “By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.” Eph. 2:8. We are saved by nothing less than God’s unchangeable Word, and by Christ’s own personal confidence in that Word. We are not exhorted to try to do as well as He did, or to try to exercise as much faith as He had, but simply to take His faith, and let it work by love, and purify the heart.

**Believing Is Receiving.**—“As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name.” John 1:12. That is, as many as believed on His name received Him. To believe on His name is to believe that He is the Son of God; to believe that He is the Son of God, means to believe that He is come in the flesh, in human flesh, in our flesh, for His name is “God with us;” so to believe on His name means simply to believe that He dwells personally in every man,—in all flesh. We do not make it so by believing it; it is so, whether we believe it or not; we simply accept the fact, which all nature reveals to us.

It follows, then, as a matter of course that, believing in Christ, we are justified by the faith of Christ, since we have Him personally dwelling in us, exercising His own faith. All power in heaven and earth is in His hands, and, recognizing this, we simply allow Him to exercise His own power in His own way.

**Personal Experience.**—The reader will now see the object of Paul’s narrative. Instead of beginning with abstract argument, to convince the Galatians of their error, he began with telling his own personal experience. That led him to tell what he said on another occasion, when some had erred concerning the faith. But all the time he is dealing with facts. He is telling what he knows, and the burden of the whole is personal acquaintance with Christ.

The Gospel is no dead thing, no abstract doctrine, no “works done in righteousness, which we did ourselves” (Titus 3:5, R.V.), but a personal, acceptance of the personal Christ, who alone has power to work salvation. Christ as a living Saviour, always and everywhere present, always active and mighty to save, is the theme of the apostle’s letter from first to last, but especially in the portion now before us, and that which follows.

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