#73 "Justified by Faith"

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When it comes to our eternal destination, no element of Christian theology is more important than that surrounding what we believe about salvation. In fact, when it comes to preserving an accurate gospel message, Paul says in Galatians 1:8-9,

> "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!"

Paul says the same thing twice to emphasize that the gospel will be attacked. Its purity will be distorted, and Satan will devise many deceptions that look and sound like gospel truth but are in fact far from it. Other religions and cults have been developed by those who claimed to hear angelic revelations of "new truth." But these failed to receive Paul's teaching that the gospel is fully revealed in Jesus Christ in the Scriptures, and those who alter it or add or take away from it will be accursed (Revelation 22:18-19). This leads us to the fact that we can have great joy and security in knowing our eternal destination because we have a gospel that cannot, does not, and will not change. There is one way to be saved, and if we go the way God has ordained, we will be saved. If we don't, we won't. It is as simple as that, and the future of all mankind rests upon what each person does with the absolute truth of the infallible (2 Timothy 3:16), perfect (Psalm 19:7), and enduring gospel message (1 Peter 1:25).

Given the profound implications of the gospel, we had better be sure we understand what it is and be able to communicate it to others. One of the key words that the Scripture repeatedly uses in describing salvation is **justification** (e.g. Luke 18:14, Romans 3:24, Romans 5:1, Romans 5:9, 1 Corinthians 6:11). *To justify someone is to declare or reckon him or her innocent. It is a pronouncement that one has been declared free of guilt as he or she desired to be.* Galatians 2:16 says,

"Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified."

Here we see that the way to be justified and made righteous in God's sight, innocent of evil and free from guilt, is not by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 makes it clear that man cannot save himself by doing good works because as Romans 3:23 states, all fall short of God's glorious, perfect standard. Man, left to his own sin-marred inability is hopeless and

helpless. But, God sent His Son to die for the sins of the world so that those who would believe in Him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16). The world stands condemned in its evil deeds and sin nature, and Christ did not come to condemn it (for it is already condemned) but to save it (John 3:17). Yet we as humans must respond to the gracious gift of God and receive the gift. As John 1:12-13 says,

> "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

God's grace must move in a person's heart (and Christ does draw all men- John 12:32) at which point each individual must respond to the knowledge and revelation that he or she has been given by believing Christ is Who He said He was (God, Lord, Savior) and will do what He said He will do (save, forgive, grant eternal life).

The way to be justified is thus very simple: believe upon Jesus (Acts 16:31). John 6:29 says, "Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He has sent.'" Salvation is a work of God in our hearts as we believe in Jesus Christ to be our Savior and to forgive us. This belief is not merely faith that Jesus existed or a detached intellectual belief that Jesus is God without surrendering our hearts to Him. After all, even the demons believe in God (James 2:19). We must believe Jesus died for our sins, and we must yield to Him in repentance, the outworking of faith (Luke 13:5, Mark 1:15). It is only through the name of Christ and the work of Christ on the cross on our behalf that we can be saved. Acts 4:12 says, "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

We will all have to face the judgment one day (Acts 17:31), and the question of utmost importance is whether or not we have been justified. Some trust in receiving saving grace through baptism or through the Lord's Supper. This is not what the Bible teaches. Some trust in membership in a church. This is in error. Some trust in their own "goodness," a sure way to fail. We must come to a place where we choose to believe in Jesus and to trust in His work to be our hope of salvation. He becomes our Savior and Lord, and He changes us from the inside out (2 Corinthians 5:17). We can't idly and passively receive righteousness, as if we are not to have any role in the process. Nor can we suppose that it is we ourselves who can earn righteousness. Grace is a gift of God through Christ, and it is received by faith. Faith is a decision of the heart, mind, and will to believe. It is active, real, and a choice to be made. "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS" (Romans 4:3). As Abraham was justified by believing God's Word to Him, we must believe God's Word to us, the fullness of which has been revealed through the Person and work of Christ. We must each come to a place where we choose Christ so that we may live (Deuteronomy 30:19, Joshua 24:15). Lest Jesus say to us, "I never knew you;

DEPART FROM ME," (Matthew 7:23) we must be sure we know Him by choosing Him as we put our faith in Him and receive His grace. There is no other way to be justified.