

Justification – the heart of the Gospel

This week's verse: Galatians 2:11-21

I. Intro

- A. This week we will continue our focus on Justification. This is the heart of the Gospel and the core of what Christianity is all about.
- B. My blog: <http://www.sarcasmagorical.com>
 - i. I'll post class notes, and sometimes a full written post on what the class was about.
 - ii. Disclaimer – my posts are my opinion, not the church's or anyone else's

II. Background

- A. Historical Context (from Easton's Bible Commentary)

“The genuineness of this epistle is not called in question. Its Pauline origin is universally acknowledged.

Occasion of. The churches of Galatia were founded by Paul himself (Acts 16:6; Galatians 1:8; 4:13,19). They seem to have been composed mainly of converts from heathenism (4:8), but partly also of Jewish converts, who probably, under the influence of Judaizing teachers, sought to incorporate the rites of Judaism with Christianity, and by their active zeal had succeeded in inducing the majority of the churches to adopt their views (1:6; 3:1). This epistle was written for the purpose of counteracting this Judaizing tendency, and of recalling the Galatians to the simplicity of the gospel, and at the same time also of vindicating Paul's claim to be a divinely-commissioned apostle.

Time and place of writing. The epistle was probably written very soon after Paul's second visit to Galatia (Acts 18:23). The references of the epistle appear to agree with this conclusion. The visit to Jerusalem, mentioned in Galatians 2:1-10, was identical with that of Acts 15, and it is spoken of as a thing of the past, and consequently the epistle was written subsequently to the council of Jerusalem. The similarity between this epistle and that to the Romans has led to the conclusion that they were both written at the same time, namely, in the winter of A.D. 57-8, during Paul's stay in Corinth (Acts 20:2,3). This to the Galatians is written on the urgency of the occasion, tidings having reached him of the state of matters; and that to the Romans in a more deliberate and systematic way, in exposition of the same great doctrines of the gospel.

Contents of: The great question discussed is, Was the Jewish law binding on Christians? The epistle is designed to prove against the Jews that men are justified by faith without the works of the law of Moses. After an introductory address (Galatians 1:1-10) the apostle discusses the subjects which had occasioned the epistle. (1) He defends his apostolic authority (1:11-19; 2:1-14); (2) shows the evil influence of the Judaizers in destroying the very essence of the gospel (3 and 4); (3) exhorts the Galatian believers to stand fast in the faith as it is in Jesus, and to

abound in the fruits of the Spirit, and in a right use of their Christian freedom ((5-6:1-10)); (4) and then concludes with a summary of the topics discussed, and with the benediction.

The Epistle to the Galatians and that to the Romans taken together "form a complete proof that justification is not to be obtained meritoriously either by works of morality or by rites and ceremonies, though of divine appointment; but that it is a free gift, proceeding entirely from the mercy of God, to those who receive it by faith in Jesus our Lord."

In the conclusion of the epistle (6:11) Paul says, "Ye see how large a letter I have written with mine own hand." It is implied that this was different from his ordinary usage, which was simply to write the concluding salutation with his own hand, indicating that the rest of the epistle was written by another hand. Regarding this conclusion, Lightfoot, in his Commentary on the epistle, says: "At this point the apostle takes the pen from his amanuensis, and the concluding paragraph is written with his own hand. From the time when letters began to be forged in his name (2 Thessalonians 2:2; 3:17) it seems to have been his practice to close with a few words in his own handwriting, as a precaution against such forgeries...In the present case he writes a whole paragraph, summing up the main lessons of the epistle in terse, eager, disjointed sentences. He writes it, too, in large, bold characters (Gr. pelikois grammasin), that his hand-writing may reflect the energy and determination of his soul.""

- i. Paul is pretty much universally accepted as the author of the epistle
- ii. The Galatian church and the problem of the Judaizers
 1. Judaizers were Jewish converts to Christianity that wanted to maintain all Jewish customs, ceremony and law – including circumcision
 2. They taught that anyone who wanted to become a Christian must first become a Jew, and that the Law still held a primary place in the life of Christians.
 3. They also questioned Paul's authority as an apostle, and claimed that he fought with Peter over whether or not the Gentiles should be allowed to be Christians, and that he previously required circumcision, but then went back on his teaching.
 4. We'll get into Paul's response later in the Literary Context
- iii. Another piece of historical context
 1. Jews in the Roman empire enjoyed some sense of respectability and authority
 2. They were still somewhat second class citizens, but for the most part weren't persecuted
 3. If Christianity could be seen as just some sort of special Judaism, then Christians wouldn't draw so much attention and wouldn't be persecuted

4. So there is tremendous cultural pressure that motivates the Judaizers as well – they don't want to lose the little niche in Roman society, and they don't want to be persecuted

iv. Romans and Galatians

1. Due to the problem of the Judaizers, Galatians was written quickly and simply to address the problem and stress the basics of the Gospel.
2. Romans was less urgent, so it is a more drawn out treatise on the same topic of the Gospel.
3. We looked at Romans the last two weeks, and we'll look at Galatians this week and the next

B. Literary Context

i. Paul answers the Judaizers claims

1. In the first chapter and a half, Paul defends his authority as an Apostle
2. In 2:11-14, Paul tells his story of his confrontation with Peter – which also demonstrates his claim to apostleship
3. He also addresses the issue of circumcision, as well as the inconsistency that they are accusing him of, in 2:1-5 and again in chapter 5.
 - a. Paul had Timothy circumcised, in order to not stumble the Jews to whom they were ministering
 - b. Paul refused to let Titus be circumcised, because the Judaizers demanded it
 - c. In our liberty, we should, as one commentator said, "Limit our freedoms, to broaden our ministries."
 - d. But when someone claims we must do something in order to be saved, the truth of the Gospel is at stake, and we should oppose them

ii. From 2:15 through chapter 6, Paul articulates the basics of the Gospel, reminding the Galatians of what he taught them when he was first with them.

C. Content

D. Jesus Hermeneutic

i. Recap

1. In the first class, we looked at how the Law condemns us and leaves us with no hope but Christ's death.
2. In the second class, Aaron taught us how Romans 6 tells us that we are united to Christ's death in our baptism. That we have died in Christ.

ii. Today's verses

1. We'll see that having been turned from the law to Christ, we cannot look back to the Law
2. We'll also see that since we have died to the Law, it no longer holds any authority over us

3. We'll see that we have died to the Law, so that we might live to Christ.

III. Paul confronts Peter

A. The dispute

- i. Understanding the historical context
 1. The Jews were commanded to remove themselves from the rest of the world as part of their chosenness
 2. Circumcision was the sign of this – that they were cut apart from the rest of the people, and bared a physical mark that displayed this
 3. Jews were commanded not to eat with Gentiles, as part of the ceremonial laws
- ii. Peter's actions
 1. Verse 12 – “For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party”
 2. Peter realized that through Christ all believers are made righteous, and so he ate and spent time with Gentiles
 3. When the Judaizers came, Peter capitulated and stopped eating with the Gentiles
 4. This led other Jews to do the same, and consider the Gentiles as less than righteous
 5. It also led Gentiles to suspect their liberty and feel as though they needed to keep the Law to be considered righteous.
- iii. Paul's rebuke
 1. Peter's actions called the truth of the Gospel into question
 - a. Verse 14: “I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel”
 - b. If everyone, Jew or Gentile, was made completely righteous by virtue of Christ's righteousness, then how could there be a distinction between the “clean” Jews and “unclean” Gentiles
 - c. If we were saved by our faith alone, then why was Peter seemingly adding circumcision to the Gospel
 2. Peter's actions were hypocritical
 - a. Verse 14: “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”
 - b. Peter seemingly made the Gentiles subject to the Law, by refusing to allow them into the communion
 - c. Yet when he was with Gentiles only he exempted himself from the law, by eating with them
 - d. Essentially he was trying to have it one way when the Judaizers weren't looking, and another way when they were

- B. It is important to note that this is not a dispute on doctrine
 - i. It does not show that the doctrines of our faith are up for debate amongst the apostles
 - ii. Paul and Peter both agree on this issue, as can be seen by the fact that Peter used to eat with Gentiles
 - iii. Paul is rebuking Peter for not standing up firmly enough for what he believes, not for believing an error
- C. This historical example can teach us
 - i. Teaches us about how even the best of us need correction
 - 1. Peter was an apostle, having so much courage eventually to be martyred for the cause of Christ
 - 2. Yet in this case, he too needed to be reprimanded for a lack of courage
 - ii. Teaches us about publicly correcting someone
 - 1. Peter's error was a public one, as evidenced by Barnabas and other following his example. As a public problem, it had to be dealt with in public
 - 2. Peter had a specific and lofty role as an Apostle. His example was not to be taken lightly, especially as regarded the truth of the Gospel. For this reason, this issue had to be resolved publicly, that it might not lead to division later on.
 - iii. Teaches us how a bad example can teach powerful doctrines
 - 1. Peter never wavered in his teaching about the Gospel
 - 2. Yet his actions called the Gospel into question
 - 3. It not only lead the Jews to separate from the Gentiles, causing division in the Church, but it lead the Jews and Gentiles themselves to suspect that they were somehow in need of the Law.

IV. The law does not help the Jews

- A. Verses 15-16: "We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified."
- B. The Jews, choseness and the Law
 - i. The Jews were given the Law
 - 1. As we looked at in the first week, the Jews prided themselves as being the people given the ceremonial law
 - 2. But the law condemns us, and leaves us with no righteousness of our own
 - 3. In addition to that, the Law points to Christ. If the Law itself points to a different means of righteousness, then it can't be a means to righteousness itself
 - ii. The choseness of the Jews
 - 1. The Jews were God's chosen people – set apart from the rest of the world

2. Paul is drawing attention to this when he mentions “and not sinners, of the Gentiles.” – i.e. the Jews were called out of the rest of the world, and chosen, unlike the Gentiles
- iii. Paul’s argument
1. The Law didn’t help us
 - a. Even though the Jews had the Law, they still couldn’t keep it
 - b. The Jews, the people with the Law, turned away from the Law and looked to Christ instead for salvation
 - c. How much more then, do the Gentiles need to turn from the Law to Christ
 2. Our special status as Jews didn’t help us
 - a. Even though the Jews were set apart, and circumcised as a sign, it still did not provide them with enough righteousness to overcome their sin
 - b. The Jews turned to Christ, even though they were set apart, because they needed salvation as much as anyone else
 - c. How much more do the Gentiles, who weren’t chosen or set apart as Jews, need to fix their eyes full yon the promise of Christ
 3. “If even we chosen people - who were given the Law and who look like we are so much closer to God – if even we needed to look to Christ, then why should anyone else trust in the Law? Or in circumcision? We, of all people, should trust in these things if they are trustworthy, but we know they aren’t, and that’s why we believed the Gospel in the first place.”

- V. Faith in Christ alone must save us, it cannot coexist with the Law or works
- A. Verse 19: “For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God.”
 - i. Through the law – the law prophesied the coming of Christ and the means of Justification
 - ii. Died to the law – the law declares that the wages of sin is death, and therefore I have died to it. It cannot condemn me any more, because it has already killed me. Nor can I look to it for righteousness, because I’m dead to it
 - iii. That I might live to God – our obedience is to God, not to the Law. This doesn’t mean that we will live in total, unrepentant sin, because we were saved to do good works (Eph. 2:8-10, 1 Pet. 2:9)
 - B. Luther: “The moment you begin to have faith you learn that all things in you are altogether blameworthy, sinful, and damnable.” He goes on to quote the verses we studied the first week,
 - C. Faith begins in the realization that we have no way to make ourselves righteous, and that we must seek another kind of righteousness
 - D. If that is the beginning of faith, then the continuation of faith is the same. We constantly remember that we have a borrowed righteousness, and that it is only by God’s grace we are able to do good works

- E. When we trust in faith and works, we end up trusting in works and destroying faith. This leaves us where we were before the Gospel, with insufficient works to save ourselves
- F. Luther quotes Aesop's fable – there was a dog that was walking with a big piece of meat in his mouth. He noticed his reflection in the stream, and saw the meat. He opened his mouth to snap at the meat of the reflection and lost both the meat and the reflection
- G. Luther: “It ought to be the first concern of every Christian to lay aside all confidence in works and increasingly to strengthen faith alone and through faith to grow in the knowledge, not of works, but of Christ Jesus, who suffered and rose for him.”

VI. Being united to Christ in our death, through baptism

- A. “I have been crucified with Christ....”
- B. I'll let Aaron recap a few things from last week's lesson on baptism (Romans 6)

VII. Justification by faith alone keeps us from two errors (Verse 21)

- A. “I do not set aside God's grace”
 - i. Paul argues elsewhere (Romans is a good example) that if salvation comes through the law we have no need of God's grace
 - ii. Your employer is not being gracious when you get your paycheck. He's not giving you a gift, he's giving you your due according to your agreement
 - iii. If salvation comes by works and not faith, then we toss God's grace aside, because we are claiming that we deserved it all along
- B. “If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain”
 - i. If the law and works save us, we have no need of Christ's atonement. We would simply be receiving what we deserved. We don't need someone to win for us something we already are owed
 - ii. You don't throw a life preserver to a man standing on the shore. Christ's death is only valuable to us in so far as we stood condemned and in need of a sacrifice on our behalf.
 - iii. Christ prayed so earnestly that he sweat blood in the garden of Gethsemane “My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as you will.” If it were possible for us to have been saved through any other means, God would have spared His son