

Justification – the heart of the Gospel

This week's verse: Galatians 4:21-5:1

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 Dictionary)

“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.""

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. Last week, we look at Paul's account of his confrontation with Peter, and his reiteration of the Gospel
3. He continues in chapters 3-4 to remind the Galatians of the true Gospel – that righteousness is found in Christ alone, by faith alone and that we cannot go back to the Law
 - a. He recounts the story of Abraham and how "Abram believed the Lord and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"
 - b. Paul uses this to argue that if we want to be children of Abraham, we should follow in his example of justification by faith
 - c. Paul also argues that we are heirs of Abraham only by believing in the promise as Abraham did. In other words, we are heirs of the promise God made to Abraham, and not by flesh.

ii. We'll be looking at the end of Chapter 4 today, and the differences between Law-based theology (glory) and Christ-based theology (the Cross)

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.
 - 3. Last week we looked at how since we have turned from the Law to Christ, we can't then return to the Law. We are dead to the law and it holds no more power over us.
- ii. This week we will look at the contrast between the Law and the Gospel and see how we who have faith in Christ are heirs to God's promise
- iii. We will see the contrasts between the Law and Gospel, Hagar and Sarah, Ishmael and Isaac, the Jerusalem that is and the heavenly Jerusalem, heirs of flesh and heirs of promise

III. Abraham and God's promise

- A. Paul is speaking to people who would have had a lot of familiarity with the Books of the Law, and would know their history. We are not as familiar and need a little reminding to understand what Paul is talking about.
- B. Genesis 15 – God's Promise to Abraham
 - i. Verses 1-6: God promises Abram will be the father of a great nation.
 - ii. Abram believes God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Paul seizes on this in chapter 3 to make his argument that we become children of Abraham by following this example – we believe God's promise, and we receive righteousness.
 - iii. In the rest of the chapter, God confirms His covenant with Abram through a sacrifice. This is the way that covenant's were ratified in this period of history. It shows that God is making a binding promise between Himself and Abram.
- C. Genesis 16 – Abram and Sarai's attempt at works-righteousness
 - i. Verses 1-5: Sarai doubts God's promise, because she is old and cannot possibly bear children. She convinces Abram to bring about God's promise by their works, and has him take her servant Hagar as his wife and have a child by her.
 - ii. This displays our tendency to doubt God's promise. It also illustrates how we often want to bring about God's blessings by our own actions.
 - iii. In the rest of this chapter, Hagar flees Sarai because Sarai is mad at her, but returns after being comforted by God and told to return.
 - iv. This is another example of how works-righteousness usually leads to division. People inevitably compare themselves to one another and end up either envious and jealous or haughty and self-righteous.
- D. Genesis 17 – God reiterates His promise
 - i. God reiterates His promise from chapter 16 – that Abram would be a father of a vast nation – and spells it out in further detail.

- ii. God changes Abram and Sarai's names to Abraham and Sarah, and gives them the sign of circumcision to be a physical sign of the fact that he has set them apart from the rest of the world.
- iii. Verse 17-18: Abraham actually pushes forth Ishmael as the son who should inherit the promise
 1. Abraham displays a lack of faith at this point. He first doubts that God can give a son to him and Sarah, since they are so old.
 2. Second, he tries to give God an easy way out, by offering God Ishmael. This is another example of doubting God's providence and supernatural power
 3. Lastly, he misunderstands God's promise. God would not have made these promises with him if He had not intended to keep them. God's not looking for a way out, He's looking to show His glory in providing against all natural wisdom.

E. Chapter 21 – Isaac is born

- i. Verses 1-7: Isaac is born, exactly as God had promised. Isaac's name means "laughter", because Abraham and Sarah laughed at God when He promised them a child, but now laugh with joy at the promise being fulfilled
- ii. Verses 9-12: Ishmael mocks Isaac and angers Sarah. It seems that Ishmael was rather vicious in his mocking of Isaac, because it angers Sarah so much. Most likely, Ishmael was mocking Isaac because Ishmael was the first-born, and therefore should have been entitled to the bulk of the inheritance. But Isaac was the "child of promise" and so was most likely given more honor and blessing.
- iii. Sarah gets so mad about this mocking that she actually tells Abraham to throw Hagar and Ishmael out. God confirms that this is the correct thing to do by speaking to Abraham.

IV. Children of bondage or children of the promise

A. The yoke of the Law

- i. Paul reminds the Judaizers that the Law condemns them (first week's study). "Do you not hear the Law?"
- ii. The Law, even at its best, will only lead to bondage. The Law must continually be kept in all its aspects and commands, which means that anyone who trusts in it is always one error away from destroying their righteousness.
 1. One under the Law must always satisfy its demands.
 2. Adam in the Garden of Eden - even though sin was not in the world yet - was still under the Law and therefore had to continue to obey its commands.
 3. Christ's word from the Cross, "It is finished", is something that no one under the yoke of the Law can say.
- iii. This is why he unites those who put faith in the Law to Ishmael – the child of the slave.
- iv. This is also why he unites the present Jerusalem to Mount Sinai

1. Mount Sinai was where the Ten Commandments were given to the Jewish people
2. He points out that it was in Arabia – i.e. outside of the Promised Land
3. This is to further point out the error of the Judaizers, by particularly showing how empty the things they boast of the most are.

B. The freedom of the Gospel

- i. The Gospel, however, leads to freedom rather than bondage
- ii. Christ has paid all of our debt, and his righteousness is imputed to us. There is no way we can ever have anything other than a perfect righteousness, because we have Christ's righteousness.
- iii. This means that we are under no obligation of the Law, and therefore are free from its demands.
- iv. This is why Paul unites us with Issac, the child of the promise. He was born the child of Sarah, the wife of Abraham and a free woman.
- v. This follows from what Paul was teaching earlier – that we are children of Abraham by faith
 1. John 1:12-13
 2. 1 Peter 1:17-23

C. The persecution of the free by those in bondage

- i. Paul here levels his strongest charge against the Judaizers, uniting them not only to Ishmael, but accusing them of the same error – persecuting the real children of the promise
- ii. This really had to hit them hard, as they were so proud of their lineage. Paul picks up on this to say, “yes, you are children of Abraham – but Abraham had two sons.”
- iii. It also is a heavy charge, in that it not only says that their lineage does not gain the inheritance they think it does, but that they are the ones outside persecuting the real children of God.
- iv. Lastly, Paul levels the weight of the Genesis passage on them and tells us the ultimate end of those who trust in the Law – “Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.”

V. The theology of the Cross

A. The theology of Glory

- i. We often attempt to gain God's favor by acting a certain way. There are numerous self-help books that will tell you that you can have success, spiritual power, etc if you just follow all these special steps.
- ii. This is what Luther called the Theology of Glory. It tells us that if we only had all our ducks in a row, God would be forced to bless us
- iii. It ignores that we never will have our ducks in a row, and even if we had all the right self help steps, we still wouldn't follow them
- iv. It also attempts to put God on our terms. We act a certain way so that we can manipulate Him into blessing us

B. The theology of the Cross

- i. Contradicting the theology of glory is the theology of the Cross
- ii. Veith: “We want complete and understandable answers, evidence of tangible spiritual power, all conveyed by an impressive, well-run, and effective institution. Instead, God gave us the Cross.”
- iii. Embraces the two key truths that the theology of glory misses
 - 1. This world will always have suffering of some sort. The Bible tells us the wages of sin is death, and we have to acknowledge that bad things happen to good people.
 - 2. God actively hides Himself from us, while actively revealing part of Himself to us. Deuteronomy 29:29 – “The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”