

**Justification by Faith
and its Place in the Church**

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**NEW 401 Romans & Galatians
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There are two books in the New Testament of the Holy Bible that focus most specifically on being justified by faith in Jesus Christ and that we cannot earn our salvation by works. That is in the books of Romans and Galatians. Galatians has been called a mini Romans, as it is shorter in length than Romans but it has also been called the "Magna Carta of Christian liberty, for it maintains that only through the grace of God received through faith in Jesus Christ can a person escape the curse of sin and of the law, and live a new life, not in bondage or license, but in a genuine freedom of mind and spirit through the power of God. ¹ The book of Romans though, is 16 chapters long while Galatians is only 6 chapters. In the book of Galatians Paul spends quite a bit of time chastising the Galatians where in the book of Romans Paul just gets down to the business of spelling out the gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore it has been said that Romans is "unquestionably the most important theological book ever written." ²

While the author of both Galatians and Romans, the Apostle Paul, wrote a good deal on the fundamental doctrine of being justified by faith and faith alone, Paul was nevertheless addressing two different churches and speaking to each of them specifically about the issues that needed to be addressed. We can then look at how important the issues that Paul addressed are, and imperative to the health of the church in any given time in history. Just as it can be said about any discipline, the basic fundamentals first have to be mastered else it

¹ Kenneth L. Barker and John R. Kohlenberger III. Expositor's Bible Commentary, Abridged Edition, New Testament, pg. 703 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994)

² Interpreter's Bible, The (New York: Abington Press, 1954)

leaves open not only the possibility for all sorts of trouble but is guaranteed to lead to ultimate failure, and with regards to the topic of salvation in Jesus Christ, it leads to death and destruction, which is certainly not the intended goal of God's plan of salvation for His people. In the case of God's church, the church founded on the gospel of Jesus Christ, based on the fundamental premise of justification by faith, it is most critical, otherwise the whole of the operation of the church comes to absolutely nothing. More pointedly, the false doctrine of being justified by faith and works assures both teachers and hearers (those who adhere to such a doctrine) are promised a position before God at the "Great White Throne of Judgment, which are those who are judged that are not written in the Book of Life (Revelation 20:11-15).

Before we compare the two epistles in foundational doctrine, it should probably be mentioned about the distinct differences between them. While there is a distinct difference between the two, both of them start off with Paul introducing himself as Paul, the apostle, called by God through Jesus Christ. They both then have a short blessing of grace and peace. But after that they begin to differ greatly, although still bringing up the same doctrinal points. In Romans, as was Paul's custom, he spoke a word of thanksgiving for them and that he longed to visit them. For the next part of Galatians though, instead of Paul speaking a word of blessing he speaks a curse in saying, "if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed."

Harsh, wouldn't you say? In both of the epistles Paul speaks of how circumcision profits nothing, since we are no longer under the law but grace (Romans 3:24 and Galatians 1:6). Yet in Romans, Paul doesn't mention the word circumcision any more after the 4th chapter (out of the 16) while in Galatians Paul mentions circumcision all the way through the letter. Also, in Galatians Paul used strong wording such as what was already mentioned about cursing those who preach another gospel but even by chapter three Paul still continues his rebuke by saying, "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?" By chapter 6, the final chapter, Paul still hadn't let go of the issue with the Galatians being compelled to be circumcised. Yet Paul finally put the topic to rest in the 4th from the last verse. He said, "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation." Perhaps Paul could have said just that and let it be but the fact of the matter was that believing we are still under a law is completely opposed to the very foundation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Jesus Himself said in Matthew 5:17, "Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill." Therefore it had to be thoroughly rooted out and exposed for what it was, a false doctrine that would lead people to hell instead of eternal life in Christ.

So then, both Romans and Galatians covered the topic of justification by faith thoroughly. Paul spoke of Abraham as the

father of our faith. In Romans 4:1-3 he said, "[w]hat then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Similarly, in Galatians, Paul pretty much says the same thing and added that you are only of Abraham if you have the faith of Abraham, saying, "Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham."

So while Paul spoke similarly as to faith without works, in Galatians Paul had to address the topic differently because really, he was very angry with the Galatians for allowing in that false doctrine of works (circumcision) along with faith. It brings up many problems that cannot then be overcome. If we are working toward salvation through works (even when Jesus died on the cross for our sins) then, 1. we are still dead in our sins, since no one can be justified by their own works. Romans 3:20 says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Why is that? Romans 3:23-24 explains, "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Yes, Jesus alone could pay the penalty of death that is due us. Later in Romans 6:23 Paul says, "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." Several important points can be brought out from those verses. All of

us have sinned, the wages of sin is death, eternal life comes from Jesus dying on the cross for our sins. A major point that gets overlooked many times in sharing the gospel is what Paul says about the righteousness of God, after his introduction and salutation. He gets right to the point by summarizing the theme of the epistle by stating, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, "The just shall live by faith.'" (Romans 1:16-17) The righteousness of God is revealed through Jesus Christ. What would have been the point of Jesus overcoming the devil through all forms of temptation if it wasn't the righteousness of God that justifies us before God. Why also would it be necessary for Christ to take our place on the cross and die for our sins if it wasn't necessary for the righteousness of God to be revealed to us, through His Son Jesus, as being the justification for our faith. So important is Romans 1:16-17, that it was the clear and definitive word that gave Martin Luther, the father of The Reformation, the confidence in declaring sola fide, or faith alone, as to what saves us from sin. ³

Similarly in Galatians, once Paul got past defending himself and his authority, Paul says in 2:16, "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith

³ Earle E. Cairns. Christianity Through the Centuries, pg. 282 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996)

in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified." Shortly thereafter in the letter Paul quotes from Habakkuk 2:4, "for the just shall live by faith." And to complement the tone of the letter to the Galatians, just before Paul quotes Habakkuk he speaks another curse in saying, "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." So Paul had said cursed is anyone who preaches a gospel of works with faith and cursed also is a person who tries to live according to that doctrine.

2. If we still need to be justified by God through our works then Jesus died on the cross in vain, for no good reason. He could have lived out His years fully as a wise old man that everyone made treks to seek out for His grand wisdom, and then He could have died on a mountain like Moses and have God bury His body. Yet in both epistles Paul effectively explains that it was in Christ and His sacrifice for our sins that we could be justified . Paul said in Romans 3:25-26, "[Jesus] whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus." Likewise in Galatians Paul says of Jesus, "Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree").

There is Paul speaking of the curse again but in this instance he is saying that Christ became that curse for us in taking on our sin and shame by dying on a cross (a tree), so that we may be justified before God and have eternal life in Jesus Christ. Only God is just, only God is Righteous, and Paul makes that distinction obvious in his words. Unfortunately for the Galatians it had to be worded in the form of a rebuke. Yet nevertheless, as Jude, the brother of Jesus said, "but others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire, hating even the garment defiled by the flesh." (Jude 23) Paul knew he was pulling some folks out of a deadly fire and he hated the very thought of the false doctrine of faith with works.

There are many ways of saying what the effects of adding works to faith does, such as putting you back into bondage, it puts Christ back up on the cross, it reaps corruption, it nullifies the promise of faith, Christ died then in vain, or you are no longer in grace but are dead in the law but the end result is always the same. You are then judged according to the law (of which none can be justified) and your destination is into "the everlasting fire that was prepared for the devil and his angels." (Matthew 25:41)

The last quote in Matthew 25:41 you may note was a quote from Jesus saying that in response to those who don't do the will of the Father will be thrown into the everlasting fire. Just as Jesus had said earlier in Matthew 7:21-23, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord,

have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

Wait a minute, is not Jesus preaching works with faith? It seems to be at odds with the doctrine of justification by faith that Paul stressed in his letters to the Galatians and Romans. Jesus would say to those who did not do His will, "I never knew you" and would cast that person into the everlasting fire. How can we reconcile what Jesus said with what Paul was teaching on the doctrine of justification by faith and faith alone. Well, I suppose it could be compared to the analogy of the practicing of the fundamentals that was mentioned earlier. If we start with the foundation of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins and that we need to just believe on Him and we will be saved, we are then justified, and made a new creation as Paul said in Galatians 6:15. Then as Paul went on to explain in Romans chapter 8, "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death." (8:2) This is where Paul uses different ways to explain the same concept as to what happens after we believe on Christ for taking our sins upon Himself and through His righteousness it is imputed unto us as being justified and righteous before God. In Galatians 2:20 Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live

by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Later in Galatians Paul speaks of the works of the flesh, and he then says that "those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." (Galatians 5:21) He then says, "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law. And those who are Christ's have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Galatians 5:22-25) Similarly, Paul says in Romans 8:5-11, "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be. So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

So when we believe on the Lord Jesus Christ for dying on the cross for our sins and that He raised from the dead on the third day, conquering death so that we can have eternal life in Him, we become a

new creation, born again as Jesus said to the Jewish leader Nicodemus, we then consider ourselves dead to sin and then live according to the Spirit that dwells in us. His Spirit then "bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God." (Romans 8:16) "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God." We become a child of God. We are His child. In a way that we can understand it, is Paul saying that we become a child of God. Jesus explained it in a different analogy in John 15 by saying that we become grafted into Him as He is the vine and we are the branches. We become, as Paul said, debtors to God, as belonging to God and also as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 6:20, " For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's."

While the exhortation to the Galatians towards holy living, living in the Spirit, is wrought out in chapters 5 & 6, and speaks of the fruit of the Spirit, as mentioned above, Romans 12, is considered to be the apex of messages on holy living which starts out with, "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." What that helps clear up in all of the justification by faith alone and still being called to obedience is that it says that it is truly the work of the Holy Spirit that does the changing of our being. Likewise

in verse 3, Paul says that it is God who gives each their measure of faith. So then, as Paul said in Galatians 6:14, "But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world."

One last point of interest, when considering the application of the two epistles Galatians and Romans, to the church at any given time, is the vast difference in Paul's closing section. In Galatians Paul is still harsh in his words in saying, "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, that he will also reap." (6:7) And as was mentioned earlier, Paul got in one more dig on the topic of circumcision. Then in his final words in 6:17-18 he says, "From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus. Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen." It was almost as though the Holy Spirit had to push Paul beyond his boundaries to speak that last sentence of blessing. Compare that closing with the closing in Romans. In Romans 16 Paul gives a very large list of commendation to those in Rome who were "beloved", "labored much", "fellow worker[s]", "my countryman", "fellow prisoners", "brethren", and "saints." Among them are women, couples, slave, and free, house churches, apostles, and deacons, and deaconesses. It is very clear from that closing of commendation, that the church in Rome was doing good things for the kingdom of God, by working together for the glory of God. What was working is that they were not allowing division to hinder the work of the saints. Paul points out a warning about divisions right after his

commendations, saying "Now I urge you, brethren, note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and avoid them. For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple." No doubt he thought of the church in Galatia when he wrote that and just mentioned it as to point out what can lead to the downfall of the church. As was opposite of the Galatian church, this was certainly to be received as more of a friendly, something to be looking out for kind of thing. As F.F Bruce said of this part of the message, "The reputation which the Roman church enjoyed for fidelity to the gospel was such, however, that a brief admonition against such sowers of discord would be sufficient." ⁴

For the church in Christ Jesus, for then and for today, the key components to these two letters can then be summed up in what has been mentioned.

1. holding onto the doctrine of faith without works, faith alone.
2. be obedient to the calling of being a child of God by no longer walking in the flesh but in the Spirit.
3. working together, avoiding divisions, for the furthering of the kingdom of god
4. And in all things, may God get the glory

Just as Paul said of Abraham, the father of our faith, "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was

⁴ F. F. Bruce. Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, Romans, pg. 276 (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1985)

strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore "it was accounted to him for righteousness." (Romans 4:20) The difference now though is the righteousness of God has been revealed to us through His Son Jesus, who died on a cross for our sins, raised from the dead on the third day, and has promised eternal life in Him, to all who will believe. Amen.

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