

Isaiah 61:10-62:3  
 Psalm 147:13-21  
 Galatians 3:23-25, 4:4-7  
 John 1:1-18

Galatians 3:26  
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## JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

Jesus made profound changes when he came and dwelt among us. Instead of obedience to the law, *repentance* and *faith* became the way to salvation and life for all men. Today's lesson in Galatians explains how faith in Jesus Christ has accomplished these things for you, and for all mankind.

The lesson in Galatians also helps explain the final verses in our gospel lesson: "*And from his fullness have we all received, grace upon grace. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.*" (John 1:16-18)<sup>1</sup>. Discuss this passage before proceeding with the lesson today, as well as the difference between *grace* and *mercy*: *Mercy* happens when you don't get what you deserve, and *grace* happens when you get what you don't deserve. How is the *law* contrasted with *grace* in John 1:17?

Also discuss the relationship of *faith* to *grace* using Eph 2:8-9, "*For by grace you have been saved through faith; and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God -- not because of works, lest any man should boast.*" Even your faith, far from being an achievement of your will, is God's personal gift to you!

Gal 3:23-26. *Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed.* <sup>24</sup>*So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith.* <sup>25</sup>*But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; <sup>26</sup>for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith.*

- *Before faith came, we were confined under the law ...* (v.23). What is meant by "before faith came"? Certainly the people of Israel believed in God before Jesus came. Nor does faith come only when you receive Christ. After all, everyone has faith in something. But when Jesus came, *faith* took on a new dimension. God, who had led his people out of slavery in Egypt and had given them the law and the prophets, would now lead his people out of slavery to sin and death, and give them *grace* and *truth*. So the saying, "*Before faith came ...*" implies that when Christ came, a *new kind of faith* entered the world.

*Faith* in the original Greek means about the same today as it did originally. In it are aspects of belief, conviction, and reliance. It is used for things that may be verified eventually through experience, but not in the present by direct and immediate experimental proof. The most succinct definition of faith in Scripture is in Heb 11:1, "*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*" The KJV uses *substance* in place of assurance. The NLT paraphrase of Heb 11:1 is enlightening: "*Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see.*"

*Faith* produces evidence of itself by infusing into the human soul a power which, when unleashed, begins to transform one's entire life. Lack of faith, which inhibits this power, manifests itself primarily in two ways: (1) "Faith in God is an illusion. If something exists, it must be observable. If something is true, it must be provable." This is *faith in self*, and nothing more. (2) "Faith in God causes me to believe in my own understanding of the truth of Scripture. Any belief or theory that conflicts with my understanding must therefore be wrong." This is another kind of faith in self – the *pride of life*.

*Faith* is a word found in nearly every book of the NT. It appears fourteen times in Gal 3 alone. Read Gal 3:1-3, for example, "*O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?*" Obedience to law had always been man's notion of the way to salvation, but the question made men

<sup>1</sup> Bible quotations are from the RSV unless otherwise noted.

think again: “How did I receive the Spirit?” How did you? Are you sure Christ is risen? Why?

*Faith* and the *law* are opposed to each other in the following sense: The *law*, as used in Galatians, includes more than the Mosaic Law. Galatians 3:19 says it was “*added because of transgressions*,” and the Law of Moses wasn’t the only thing that was “added because of transgressions.” Natural law was added, and the world became as it is today. The Bible says, “*Against its will, all creation was subjected to God’s curse*” (Rom 8:20, NLT); in other words, all life is subject to the laws of thermodynamics – to randomness, decay, and death – *because of transgressions*, that is, as a result of man’s sin.

But *faith* brings God’s grace, which opposes and overcomes the natural consequences of the law acting on sin. Compare Rom 5:20-21: “*Law came in, to increase the trespass; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.*” Thus, faith and the law are also opposed in the sense that the wages of sin (through the law) is death, but the free gift of God (through faith) is eternal life (Rom 6:23).

- ... *we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed* (v.23). “*I can will what is right, but I cannot do it*” (Rom 7:18). My “flesh,” that is, my fallen nature, prevents me from always doing what I know is right. This is *confinement*. It is captivity – bondage – prison without bars.

God said, “*Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever...*” (Gen 3:22-24). The law effectively guards the way to the tree of life. We strive to overcome it and live forever on our own terms. But it is the *grace* of God, not the law, that lets us live forever – on his terms rather than our own. “*Truly, truly, I say to you,*” Jesus, said, “*He who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life*” (John 5:24). Thus, “believing” is more than mere intellectual assent. It is repenting of what you have been, and surrendering without reservation all that you are, and all that you will be, to the will of God.

In what sense was faith hidden before it was *revealed* (v.23)? According to Scripture (Heb 11:4-38, for example), *faith* has motivated righteous people throughout history. But Jesus Christ has revealed faith, and the power of faith, in a new and complete form. In him we are *forgiven*. We are enabled to *know the truth* and become righteous through God’s grace, even as he is righteous. *For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ* (John 1:17).

- *The law was our custodian until Christ came* (v.24). Commentators use the analogy of a protective servant or a school bus driver whose job is to get the children safely home from school. When you come to Christ, the custodian’s job is done, because you are safely at home.

In summary, our lesson says faith is superior to the law. It does things the law cannot do:

- (1) Faith saves. Jesus said, “*I tell you the truth, those who listen to my message and believe in God who sent me have eternal life. They will never be condemned for their sins, but they have already passed from death into life*” (John 5:24).
- (2) Faith redeems. *But when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons* (Gal 4:4-5).
- (3) Faith justifies. It is as if God says to you, “I love my Son very much. If you love him and believe in him, you are my kind of person.” You are *justified* in God’s sight by your love for his Son.
- (4) Faith is a gift. *It is the gift of God – not because of works, lest any man should boast* (Eph 2:9, above). It is a gift often asked for, and always freely given. If you lack faith, ask for it now.
- (5) Faith is a shield against evil forces we do not understand and cannot always overcome on our own. With the shield of faith, you can *quench all the flaming darts of the evil one* (Eph 6:16).

It is worth noting that the letter to the Galatians is a letter to the *church*. The danger Paul sees is that people in the church will fall back into believing their obedience to the law will justify their lives before God. It’s been tried, and it never works. You can’t do it on your own. You need Christ.

God approves of your good works, but he wants more. He seeks to live *within* you – to be the source of your good works – to create a new person within. This is the only way to be “good” in the sight of God. Jesus put it simply: “*Apart from me you can do nothing*” (John 15:5).