

Discipleship Series for New Believers

Lesson 13: Justification by Faith

By Kristin Bone

"This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" This portion of scripture, Galatians 3:2-3 shows the folly that someone who does not have a correct understanding of justification by faith can fall into. None of us can be justified by the works of the law but by faith alone. We do good works for God not to gain merit with Him but because we love Him and want to please Him. Some people, however, become caught in a trap. Instead of relying on Christ's sacrifice on the cross, they begin to use their own works or strive to perfect themselves and come closer to God. I will be demonstrating the cause, the bondage, and the solution of trying to justify ourselves by works instead of by faith.

Galatians 4:22-24 illustrates the root cause of why people continue to cling to their works even after they come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. These passages read: "For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman by promise. Which things are an allegory: for these are the two covenants; the one from the Mt. Sinai, which genders to bondage, which is Agar." It is difficult for our flesh to die and for our flesh to cease striving towards sanctification. Faith cannot come from the flesh and neither can our salvation or sanctification. It is hard for people to trust in the Lord and believe in what He has done for us on the cross because this causes our flesh to be crucified. Our flesh wants to become involved and work along with our salvation. When we try to perfect our salvation or maintain our salvation by works, then we are operating in our flesh.

The law was not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. However, when we add the law to the gospel, this is when our natural minds become involved. Legalism produces bondage in our lives instead of the freedom we want so badly. Only by walking in the Spirit and not the flesh can we be set free.

Galatians 1:10-12 shows that the gospel which adds works originates from men and is used to please men. Paul declared, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Legalism can occur in our lives

when we follow the teachings of men who preach in their natural wisdom or knowledge. If we rely on our own natural wisdom or knowledge instead of the Spirit of God, this also can pervert the simplicity of the gospel to legalism.

The gospel of works is from the flesh and not born of the Spirit. The danger of relying on our soulish realm (mind, will, and emotions) or the realm of the flesh is that we can birth some truth surrounded by carnal reasoning. Legalism can be produced, and we will beget children after us.

The alternative to this soulish process is to have our messages be birthed in prayer and waiting on the Lord. When our messages are birthed in the Spirit, then there will be life, not legalism. 2 Corinthians 4:17 demonstrates the results of messages birthed by the Spirit. This verse proclaims, "Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is liberty." Someone speaking by the Holy Spirit will bring about change in the spirit of a man. If someone speaks from their own intellect, they will stimulate the mind of a man, but they will not produce eternal change. The same can be said of someone who speaks to the emotions of a man. Time will show that no change has occurred, but the Spirit brings eternal change and freedom.

Romans 8:13-15 shows us the fruit of living by the flesh. This next portion of scripture also shows us how to crucify our flesh. Our flesh dies as we are led by the Spirit. This is helpful to us because as it has already been shown, legalism stems from the flesh. A man relying on his soulish realm can preach legalism.

"For if you live after the flesh you shall die; but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For you have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba Father." When we are not led by the Spirit, we are always afraid. When we become afraid, we do not please God. As we become fearful, we strive to please Him more, but this is not the way the Lord has chosen us to live. We are His sons and daughters. Sons and daughters do not have to earn their parents' love. All sons and daughters have to do is breathe and their parents love them. The same thing is true of our Heavenly Father. We do not have to work and work to earn His approval. What pleases the Lord is having faith in Jesus Christ for salvation and to trust that His sacrifice was enough.

Romans 10:2-4 shows us a perfect picture of legalism and a picture of justification by faith. It states, "For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and seeking to establish their own

righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes."

When we are ignorant of how righteous God is, we make Him too approachable or common. When we do not truly understand Christ's sacrifice was enough, we will try to use our own righteousness to come to God. The Lord wants us to have faith in Him and submit ourselves to Christ that His righteousness can be imparted to us.

Jesus Christ is enough for us, and when we place our faith in Him, we are seen as perfect in the eyes of God. Our position before the Lord is secure. No amount of striving or work will draw us closer to Him. However, as we are led by the Spirit and rely on His Spirit in everything, we will have life and be drawn closer to Him.