

## Third lesson on St. Paul

### WE ARE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN JESUS

Biblical passages (Acts 16/ Romans 1-4/ Ephesians 2/ James 2/ Hebrews 11)

---

Justification by faith is an important doctrine St. Paul's teaching on justification by faith is a very core faith of Christianity. It separates biblical Christianity from all other belief systems. Other religions teach that human beings can work his way to God (salvation) but Christianity holds the doctrine of salvation very different from other religions and that Christian doctrine is coming from the gospels and St. Paul's teaching in his letters.

The Bible states in several places that justification only comes through faith (Romans 5:1; Galatians 3:24). Justification is not earned through our own works; rather, we are covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8; Titus 3:5). The Christian, being declared righteous, is thus freed from the guilt of sin. Justification is a work of God with our cooperation. Understanding the doctrine of justification is important for us. First, it motivates us in our spiritual growth and secondly we have an assurance of our salvation. Without an understanding of justification by faith alone, we cannot truly perceive the glorious gift of grace—God's "unmerited favor" becomes "merited" in our minds, and we begin to think we deserve salvation. The doctrine of justification by faith helps us maintain "pure devotion to Christ" (2 Corinthians 11:3).

"What is justification? What does it mean to be justified?" Simply put, to justify is to declare righteous, to make us right with God. We are justified, declared righteous, at the moment of our salvation. Our righteousness comes from placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. His sacrifice covers our sin, allowing God to see us as perfect and unblemished. Because as believers we are in Christ, God sees Christ's own righteousness when He looks at us. Romans 5:18-19 sums it up well: "Consequently, just as the result of one trespass was condemnation for all men, so also the result of one act of righteousness was justification that brings life for all men. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the one man the many will be made righteous." It is because of justification that the peace of God can rule in our lives. It is because of justification that believers can have assurance of salvation.

"Is salvation by faith alone, or by faith plus works?" This is perhaps the most important question in all of Christian theology. This question is the cause of the Reformation, the split between the Protestant churches and Catholic Church. This question is a key difference between biblical Christianity and most of the "Christian" cults. Is salvation by faith alone, or by faith plus works? Am I saved just by believing in Jesus, or do I have to believe in Jesus and do certain things?

The question of faith alone or faith plus works is made difficult by some hard-to-reconcile Bible passages. Compare Romans 3:28, 5:1 and Galatians 3:24 with James 2:24. Some see a difference between Paul (salvation is by faith alone) and James (salvation is by faith plus works). Paul dogmatically says that justification is by faith alone (Ephesians 2:8-9), while James appears to be saying that justification is by faith plus works. This apparent problem is answered by examining what exactly James is talking about. James is emphasizing the point that genuine faith in Christ will produce a changed life and good works (James 2:20-26). James is saying that a person who is truly justified by faith will have good works in his/her life. If a person claims to be a believer, but has no good works in his/her life, then he/she likely does not have genuine faith in Christ (James 2:14, 17, 20, 26). Paul informs us that we were created to do good works (Ephesians 2:10). Paul expects just as much of a changed life as James does: "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come" (2 Corinthians 5:17). James and Paul do not disagree in their teaching regarding salvation. They approach the same subject from different perspectives. Paul simply emphasized that justification is by faith alone while James put emphasis on the fact that genuine faith in Christ produces good works.

What is faith? Hebrews 11:1 sets out the definition: "Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see." Faith is that which assures us that our hope is reality, even though we cannot yet see it. If we have faith, we are convinced that what we believe is real, true, and reliable. The biblical object of faith is the person and work of Jesus Christ.

What are works? Work is a person's actions or deeds. Work is that which we perform for some kind of reward. We work at our jobs and expect to receive a paycheck for it. Even working on a voluntary basis has its own reward—praise from others, a feeling of good will, etc. In the context of salvation, works refers to good deeds we do, especially religious or charitable acts or the observance of the Old Testament law.

In the faith vs works debate, Which side is correct? What is the biblical relationship between faith and works? Works are required for salvation—but Scripture is clear that those works are Christ's, not ours. Those who have true faith in Jesus Christ will be "eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:14). The book of James emphasizes the nature of true saving faith as that which results in good works: "Faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" and "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead" (James 2:17, 26). If someone claims to have faith yet exhibits no good works, his or her faith is "dead," or nonexistent. Both faith and works are integral parts of the Christian life. James's point is that we demonstrate our faith by what we do (James 2:18).

Many profess to be Christians, but their lives and priorities indicate otherwise. Jesus put it this way: "By their fruits you will know them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Just so, every good tree bears good fruit, and a rotten tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a rotten tree bear good fruit. Every tree

that does not bear good fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. So by their fruits you will know them. Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not drive out demons in your name? Did we not do mighty deeds in your name?' Then I will declare to them solemnly, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you evildoers'" (Matthew 7:16-23). Simply saying we believe in Jesus does not save us, nor does religious service. What saves us is the Holy Spirit's regeneration of our hearts, and that regeneration will invariably be seen in a life of faith featuring ongoing obedience to God. When we have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, our lives will demonstrate that new life. Our works will be characterized by obedience to God. Unseen faith will become seen by the production of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives (Galatians 5:22). Christians belong to Christ, the Good Shepherd. As His sheep we hear His voice and follow Him (John 10:26-30).

The dangers of postmodernism: Postmodernism is a philosophy that does not believe in absolute truth, especially in matters of religion and spirituality. Postmodernism's viewpoint is exemplified in the statement "that may be true for you, but not for me." While such a response may be completely appropriate when discussing favorite foods or preferences toward art, such a mindset is dangerous when it is applied to faith.

Christian religion - Jesus Christ is the Way to God. The Christian religion is better than other religions because that which leads to God is better than that which leads away from God. We have sinfully wandered away from God (Isaiah 53:6), and we need a Guide to lead us back. Jesus is that Way (John 14:6)

Jesus is "the Truth" (John 14:6). He is the embodiment of truth, the revelation of God to humanity (Colossians 2:9), and the conveyor of God's words (John 17:8). The Christian religion is grounded in truth, being based on a historical Person whose acts were verified by eyewitnesses and recorded by four different biographers.

Jesus is "the Life" (John 14:6); He is the source of life, and without Him one cannot truly live (John 1:4; 3:36; 5:24; 10:10). Jesus provides what we need: the Bread that satisfies forever (John 6:35), the Water that gives eternal life (John 4:14; 7:37-38), and the Resurrection and the Life (John 11:25). These are more than empty claims; Jesus proved His ability to give life by raising from the dead Lazarus (John 11), Jairus' daughter (Mark 5), and the boy from Nain (Luke 7).

God is love (1 John 4:8, 16). Love is the greatest of His gifts to us (1 Corinthians 13:13) God showed His love for us in sending His one-and-only Son (John 3:16; 1 John 4:10). Jesus showed His love for us in providing for our salvation by dying on the cross (John 15:13). Jesus gave His followers a new command: "Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:34-35). Love is what motivates the believer and impels him to

greater humility and greater service for the kingdom of heaven. Christianity is unique in that it is not a system of rules but a celebration of unselfish love. "Love is the fulfillment of the law" (Romans 13:10).

Christianity: Christianity is the only religion that teaches man can do nothing to earn or pay his way into heaven. Man, a slave to the sin nature he was born with, must completely rely on the grace of God in applying Jesus Christ's sacrifice to the sins of the believer. People are saved by faith in the death and resurrection of Christ. Upon death, the spirits of Christians go to heaven, while the spirits of unbelievers go to a temporary holding place called hell. At the final judgment, unbelievers are separated from God for eternity in the lake of fire.

What is Faith? Why Faith matters? Faith isn't just a notion that some people hold onto in tough times; Faith is an important element to all human life on earth. Faith is what helps to get us through, illuminating the pathway in times of darkness, helping to give us strength in times of weakness. Without faith, we are nothing.

What is Faith and what does that mean? Hebrews 11:1 defines faith as "Faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen" Faith is the result of believing the Gospel — the good news that Jesus died for our sin and made a way for us to be right with God and spend eternity in heaven. When we allow the reality of the Gospel to affect every part of our lives, it changes the way we think which changes how we behave.

Why is Faith so Important? Sometimes, when things don't go according to plan, we lose faith, not only in ourselves, but also in any potential outcome in our lives. When we experience life's monumental failures, it's easy to lose hope and even faith.

But what's the difference? Faith goes beyond hope. While much of hope lives in the mind, faith is steeped in the heart and the spirit. While life can be hard at the best of times, faith is the knowledge, deep down inside, that things will get better. It's taking the next step when we can't see the entire staircase. Without faith, we couldn't expect that things would turn out all right for us no matter what the situation might be. Faith, then, is just as important as the air we breathe. While the oxygen in the air nourishes the body, faith nourishes the heart and the soul. It's the energy that courses through every single fiber and cell within our beings. It's part of every muscle and every strand of thought. It is the fundamental foundation of our existence. Simply put, the importance of faith cannot be underestimated.

Reasons to have faith: Faith isn't just a notion that we hold onto in tough times; faith is an important element to all human life on earth. Life is precious, but it can also be remarkably difficult at times. Faith is what helps to get us through, illuminating the

pathway in times of darkness, helping to give us strength in times of weakness. Without faith, we are nothing.

Faith in God gives us strength. When we say strength, we don't mean a physical strength but an inner resolve to withstand turmoil. The writer of Psalm 138 says of God, "In the day when I cried out, You answered me, and made me bold with strength in my soul." When we are right with God, we never go into turmoil alone. We have the Creator of the Universe on our side. For example, take David and the story of how he killed Goliath (1 Samuel 17). At the time, David was a shepherd boy, not a warrior. But when he saw Goliath mocking God's people, David approached the king and asked to go down and fight. David's ability to face powerful Goliath was the result of David's faith in God. David tells the king, "The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine" (1 Samuel 17:37). David had faith that God would defeat the giant and deliver His people, so David stood up to the king and then to the giant.

Faith in God gives us courage. Courage and strength aren't the same things, even though they are often seen together. Courage is the ability to do what scares us, to act on our beliefs despite threats of danger, to show strength in face of grief or pain. Courage, like strength, comes directly from our faith in God. Our confidence that heaven is real will directly affect the risks we're willing to take. Esther is a good example of a woman whose faith made her courageous. She was in constant danger not because of what she was doing, but simply because of who she was — a Jew. At a politically tumultuous time, Esther navigated tricky waters well and delivered the Israelites from an evil man's bitter vendetta. But it took courage to stay. Check out Esther 7 to see how she endured the schemes of her enemy and gained favor with the king to save her people.

Faith in God provides stability. We all want to persevere through the day without melting down or throwing a tantrum (despite how we feel at times). Faith in God is what allows us to experience stability in the middle of instability. When life feels out of control, we take comfort in knowing that God is in control. In the Bible, Daniel's life provides several examples of stability in the face of instability. Daniel and many other Israelites were kidnapped and forced to join the Babylonian king's service. This meant new food, new clothes, new language, new customs, and new everything. But even though Daniel was a hostage, he stayed true to what he knew about God. He wouldn't eat the things that God had told the Israelites not to eat, and God blessed him for it (Daniel 1:1-8)

Faith makes us stronger: There's a powerful story in the Book of Job. The story is about a man named Job who was as astute as any man could be. He believed strongly in God and held high his faith. But the story goes that one day the devil paid God a visit. The topic of

discussion? Job's faith. The devil reasoned that Job was faithful because he had been blessed with so much in life. Family, money, land, and respect. But the devil proposed that should God take any number of these things away from Job, he would no longer be the faithful man that God held him up to be. The devil claimed that Job would curse God. So, this agreement began when God began taking things away from Job's life. Over the course of these trials, Job loses everything that he had worked so hard to create over the years. His livestock, all his money, his family, his friends, and his health. However, even when his wife told him he should curse God, Job didn't. He remained faithful. Afterwards, God restored all of Job's worldly possessions, family, and health. To add to that, God multiplied what Job once had many times over. The moral of the story? Times might be bad and we can be easily tempted to give up but we should never lose faith. For a person without faith is likened to a stream without water they would cease to exist.

Faith helps us to discover our purpose in life: Going through life and all of its ups and downs can take a toll on us. At times, it's enough to question our very existence. But through all of the trials and tribulations we might face, it's faith that gives us that helping hand. It works to guide us in the right direction, moving us towards and allowing us to discover our purpose in life. This doesn't happen overnight. Usually, when we're faced with a difficult situation, it gets harder before it gets better. Little by little, a part of us is broken, until one day, we dig deep down inside and somehow find the strength we needed to make it through. That strength comes from our faith. Everything in life is far easier to get through when we have faith. It's the guiding light that helps push us towards our purpose.

Faith trumps stress, anxiety, and fear: It's easy to allow stress, anxiety, and fear to run our lives. We go from moment to moment worried about one thing or another. Sometimes, those worries manifest themselves into highly-stressful situations, causing not only mental anguish, but physical problems as well. There's a clear and documented connection between stress and the increased likelihood of disease and illness. We must learn to harbor faith and use it to eliminate stress, anxiety, and fear. We should think back to situations in the past when we made it through something we thought was insurmountable. We believe and expect that good things will happen, and they will. This isn't about ignoring our problems; this is about knowing that our situation will improve deep down inside our heart and our soul.

What happens to those who never hear the gospel? Much of the Christian world believes that if someone doesn't accept Jesus as Lord and Savior today—in this life—he or she will go to hell. This doctrine has launched thousands of Christian missionaries (and even crusades) with the goal of getting as many people as possible to accept the name of Jesus Christ. It has also caused much worry and anxiety over the ultimate fate of many people.

This doctrine is even the reason some question the validity of Christianity. We do not question the sincerity of those who have been motivated to preach Christ because of this belief. But we must question whether this idea was really taught by Jesus Christ.

Did Jesus condemn non-Christians to hell? Did Jesus Christ teach that those who don't accept Him in this life (nonbelievers or non-Christians) go to hell when they die to spend eternity in torment? Have the billions of people who have lived and died without ever even hearing the name Jesus gone to hell? Are the billions of Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims and atheists alive today condemned to hell unless they accept Jesus before they die?

Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation: Before we answer the above questions, we must establish that the Bible does teach that we must accept Jesus Christ to be saved. Millions have read the clear Bible verses that declare the exclusivity of Christianity—the verses that tell us that Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation. And these scriptures are absolutely true!

John 14:6: Jesus Christ dogmatically stated: “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” The only way to have a relationship with God the Father is through Jesus Christ. Acts 4:12: The apostle Peter, speaking of Jesus Christ, proclaimed, “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” We cannot be saved unless we accept and believe in Jesus Christ and what He did for each of us. John 3:16: The most famous Bible verse in Christianity declares: “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (emphasis added). Even this verse proclaiming God's love and desire to save people adds the caveat that they must “believe in Him” to have everlasting life. John 3:36: “He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.” 1 Timothy 2:5: “For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus.” 1 John 5:12: “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

But here is the dilemma: What about all of the people who have not fulfilled the basic requirement of these scriptures? What about those who have lived far removed from ever even hearing of Jesus Christ? What about those who may have heard of Jesus, but did not really understand who He was and is or what He taught? What about all the babies and children who die without ever hearing or understanding the name and message of Jesus? Is that it? Have they missed their only chance? Are all these non-Christians going to hell? Would a loving and merciful God send non-Christians to hell without knowing the truth?

What about the Bible verses that show God's love, mercy, compassion and desire for mankind to be saved? The Bible declares that "God is love" (1 John 4:8) and "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4, see also 2 Peter 3:9). Here are some other Bible verses about God's mercy and love: Psalm 86:5: You, Lord, are forgiving and good, abounding in love to all who call to you. Your mercy, O Lord, is in the heavens; Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds." Psalm 145:9 The LORD is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made.

Would a loving God send people to hell who never even had an opportunity to hear of Jesus? Would a loving God send people to hell who never had a chance to read the Bible or have the true gospel preached and explained to them? Imagine the millions of people throughout history who have lived and died in remote areas of this earth—for example, the aboriginal people of Australia, remote tribes in Africa and the Native Americans. Are these people all burning in hell because they just happened to be born at the wrong place, at the wrong time?

What about people who lived before Jesus came to earth—and never even had contact with the God of the Bible? Jesus indicates that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah are not in hell. In Matthew 10 we read about Jesus' instruction to His 12 apostles before they went out preaching the gospel. Within those instructions, Jesus made an important point that introduces us to the answer to these questions. After telling them what to do when people rejected the gospel, He made this fascinating statement: "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city!" (verse 15).

Jesus referred to Sodom and Gomorrah, the infamous cities from Genesis 19 that God destroyed for their moral depravity. He said that it will be more tolerable for the people of these ancient cities in the day of judgment than for the people who would reject the gospel taught by the apostles. Many would assume that the wicked and depraved people of Sodom and Gomorrah would have long ago been sent to hell to be punished for their evil ways. But Jesus didn't say anything about these people being in hell or being lost forever. He essentially said that the people of Sodom and Gomorrah will be resurrected at the same time the people of Christ's time will rise. At that future period of time, "the day of judgment," one group will be given more leniency than the other. Jesus' statement teaches us two essential truths: The judgment of the people of Sodom, Gomorrah and the people of Christ's time is still future. This contradicts the common belief that people are judged when they die and sent to heaven or hell. The ultimate destiny of these people isn't already determined. This also contradicts the common belief.

That should make us stop and think. Maybe there is more to learn about what happens to non-Christians after death than we might have thought. Jesus adds more insight about the day of judgment. Jesus made other statements that give us more insight into this coming judgment on non-Christians. While speaking to Pharisees who were demanding a sign from Him, Jesus said: “The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here” (Matthew 12:41-42). Christ was again speaking about the day of judgment, but not in the way it’s popularly thought of. This judgment isn’t a quick condemnation. There will be ancient Assyrians from Nineveh, the queen of Sheba, Pharisees from Christ’s time, and those from Sodom and Gomorrah (people who lived centuries apart!)—all alive at the same time! Notice they “rise up” at this time—meaning they are resurrected from their graves and given physical life.

When is the day of judgment? Revelation 20 is one of the most important parts of the Bible because it reveals details about the sequence of events that will occur after the return of Jesus Christ. We read about Satan being bound for a thousand years immediately after Christ’s return (verses 1-3) and of the resurrection of the saints—Christ’s faithful servants throughout the ages (verses 4-6). Christ and His saints will rule for 1,000 years (commonly called the Millennium). Then, after the Millennium, another group will be resurrected to life for their day of judgment. This group is called “the rest of the dead” (verse 5).

Who will be judged by Jesus? Verse 12 reveals who these people are: “I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God.” This will include the vast majority of those who have lived and died through the thousands of years of human history—all resurrected at the same time. This is the resurrection that will include all the people Jesus used as examples—the people of Sodom and Gomorrah, the people of Nineveh, the queen of Sheba and the people of Jesus’ time. The prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of this coming resurrection (Ezekiel 37:5-6). He saw how God will give physical life back to what will turn out to be billions of people.

What will happen on the day of judgment? After these people are given physical life, they will be given an opportunity to learn about God’s Word. We read, “And books were opened” (Revelation 20:12). The books refer to the books of the Bible. Those who were blinded to God’s truth before (Mark 4:11-12; Revelation 12:9) will then have the Bible opened to them—so they can truly understand it! Revelation 20:12 then goes on to say, “Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life.” This represents the opportunity for eternal life being opened to all these people. This will be accomplished by

God offering His Holy Spirit to billions of people during that period of time (Ezekiel 37:14). All of these people, the billions upon billions of them, will finally be able to understand the Bible, know and believe and obey Jesus Christ and have the opportunity to live forever.

How long will the day of judgment last? We don't know exactly, but we do know it won't be just a 24-hour day. In this context, "day" refers to a period of time, or an era. The "day" of judgment will be a period that will provide enough time for people to learn about God's Word, repent of their sins, be given God's Spirit and live their lives in accordance with God's teaching. Some have speculated, based on Isaiah 65:20, that this could be about 100 years. The length of time isn't certain, but we do know God will give plenty of time for these billions of people to "bear fruits worthy of repentance" (Matthew 3:8). This is the hope for all the people Christ mentioned—people like the queen of Sheba and the inhabitants of Sodom—and all the other people who have ever lived and not known the true God and His truth.

Conclusion: Our faith is a path to God, it is a path to salvation. There may be other paths to God, there may even be better paths to God, but this the one path we know of and we know it will take us where we need to go. So rather than speculate on other paths that may or may not lead to God, we are called to share the one path we know for certain does lead to God. So, can God save non-Christians? Yes. This is one of several reasons that we are called to treat other faiths and people of other faiths with respect. But this doesn't lessen our call as Christians to share, with respect and love, that path that God has shown to us.