

Justified by the Faith of Messiah

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The video version of this teaching is at: <https://youtu.be/OtXFNBvITw>

The Scripture reading is: Galatians 2:19-3:14

Paul wrote his letter to the Galatian body of believers to address a specific issue. Some Jewish believers in Yeshua had come to the region and taught that Gentiles had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul responds with vehemence that anyone who teaches this doctrine should be accursed.

Galatians 1:6-8 NKJV 6 I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, 7 which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.

Paul reminds the Galatians that his gospel had been accepted and endorsed by James, Peter, and John, the leaders of the followers of the Way. He goes into depth about what constitutes salvation and why circumcision does not guarantee or even confer salvation upon anyone.

The premise of the letter to the Galatians is that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised or convert to Judaism in order to be saved. Paul reminds his readers that even Jews receive salvation through faith not because they are Jews.

Galatians 2:15-16 KJV 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Paul writes that everyone is justified by the faith of Jesus Christ and not by works of the law. The word “justified” is the Greek word “dik-ah-yo’-o,” number 1344 in Strong’s Greek Concordance. It means to render just, innocent, or righteous. This same Greek word is used to translate the Hebrew word “tsedeq,” #6664 meaning rightness or justice. Tsedeq is usually translated as justice or righteousness. It is translated as “just” in Deuteronomy 16:18.

Deuteronomy 16:18 NKJV 18 "You shall appoint judges and officers in all your gates, which the LORD your God gives you, according to your tribes, and they shall judge the people with **just** judgment.

To be justified, then, means to have a legal standing of not guilty or innocent. We are declared not guilty by the faith of Jesus Christ. Most of our modern translations say “faith in Jesus Christ.” However, in this case, the King James Version, as well as the Young’s Literal translation, has it right. It is not our faith that justifies us but the faithfulness of Christ that justifies us. D. Thomas Lancaster explains in his book [The Holy Epistle to the Galatians](#):

“So it is not primarily about you and your belief in Jesus Christ as much as it is about the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. This is literally what the Greek says... The “faithfulness of Jesus Christ” is his sinless obedience, his righteousness, his merit, and the favor (grace) that God found in him.”ⁱ

Paul contrasts the faith of Jesus Christ with “works of the law.” In the context of this letter to the Galatians that Gentiles do not need to be circumcised in order to be saved, this “work of the law” is converting to

Judaism and specifically being circumcised. The act of being circumcised according to the law and obtaining status as a Jew won't earn anyone salvation. The same is true about any specific act of Torah. It is not our actions that justify us; it was and is the actions and faith of Yeshua that justifies us.

John the Baptist warned his listeners not to depend on being Jewish to earn a place in the world to come.

Matthew 3:9-10 NKJV 9 "and do not think to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. 10 "And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Yeshua warned that only those of faith would find a seat with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. Those relying on their identity as the physical descendants of Abraham will not have a place in the kingdom.

Matthew 8:11-12 NKJV 11 "And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 "But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

It seems like everything that needs to be said by Paul is complete in verses fifteen and sixteen of Galatians chapter two. However, Paul just uses these verses as the opening arguments of his case. He will make his case that salvation is by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ and not by converting to Judaism or by being born into Judaism. He begins with a metaphor of his own justification.

Galatians 2:19-20 NKJV 19 "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 "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.

Paul states that he didn't receive justification through the law; instead through the law, he learned that he was guilty of sin.

Romans 3:19-20 NKJV 19 Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.

Paul says that through that knowledge he died to the law. What does that mean that he died to the law? The seventeenth century theologian Matthew Poole comments on the phrase "died to the law":

"as (dead) to any expectation of being justified by obedience to it."

Poole continues with the phrase *That I might live to God*;

"not that I might live in disobedience to it, as it is a rule of life, but that I might live more holily unto God: so as my being dead to the law, as a covenant of works, or as to any expectation of being justified from my obedience to it, gives me no liberty to sin at all; for this is the end why God hath freed me from the bondage and rigour of the law, that I might live unto him, and serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness."ⁱⁱ

This doesn't mean that Paul stopped observing the law after being justified. Paul remained an observant Jew throughout his life. Paul testifies before Festus that he has done nothing against the Torah.

Acts 25:8 NKJV 8 while he (*Paul*) answered for himself, "Neither against the law of the Jews, nor against the temple, nor against Caesar have I offended in anything at all."

Instead of relying on his status as a Torah observant Jew; Paul relies on the faithfulness of Yeshua.

Romans 5:18-19 NKJV 18 Therefore, as through one man's offense judgment came to all men, resulting in condemnation, even so through one Man's righteous act the free gift came to all men, resulting in justification of life. 19 For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so also by one Man's obedience many will be made righteous.

Because of Yeshua's faithfulness, Paul and all of those who believe can live to God.

Romans 6:8-11 NKJV 8 Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, 9 knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him. 10 For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. 11 Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Paul concludes his first metaphor that it is the grace of God that is all important.

Galatians 2:21 - 3:1 NKJV 21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." 1 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?

If righteousness or justification (The same Greek word is used here.) comes through becoming a Jew, then Messiah died in vain. However, Paul clearly presented Messiah as being crucified. Therefore justification does not come by circumcision. Paul reminds them of the circumstances of their own salvation experience.

Galatians 3:2-3 NKJV 2 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? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

Paul asks them rhetorically if they received the Spirit by converting to Judaism. The book of Acts records Paul's message of salvation to the Gentiles in Antioch of Galatia.

Acts 13:47-48 NKJV 47 "For so the Lord has commanded us: 'I have set you as a light to the Gentiles, That you should be for salvation to the ends of the earth.'" 48 Now when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. And as many as had been appointed to eternal life believed.

The Gentiles gladly received salvation as Gentiles through Yeshua's faithfulness. This was the message they received from Paul.

Acts 13:38-39 NKJV 38 "Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man is preached to you the forgiveness of sins; 39 "and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Now, in his letter to the Galatians, Paul asks if they think that the law of Moses which couldn't justify them could now perfect them? Would being circumcised grant them salvation or even make them perfect in the sight of God?

Paul continues to make his case by referring to the faith of Abraham and God's promises to him.

Galatians 3:5-9 NKJV 5 Therefore He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you, does He do it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? -- 6 just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." 7 Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. 8 And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." 9 So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham.

The faith that Abraham had was that God would fulfill His promises to him. Specifically, God promised that Abraham's descendants would be innumerable.

Genesis 15:5-6 NKJV 5 Then He brought him outside and said, "Look now toward heaven, and count the stars if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be." 6 And he believed in the LORD, and He accounted it to him for righteousness.

Paul claims that, by implication, the descendants of Abraham will not only be those of his own flesh, but those who have the faith of Abraham. Paul cites God's promise that all nations will be blessed through Abraham as proof that both Jews and Gentiles will be counted righteous or justified through faith not through circumcision because Abraham received circumcision after he was accounted as righteous.

Paul then turns to those who thought circumcision was the means of attaining salvation. He starts out by quoting Deuteronomy 27:26 stating the obvious; Jewish people are subject to the curses described in the Torah if they do not continue to keep the Torah.

Galatians 3:10 NKJV 10 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."

Contrary to popular understanding; it is not following the Torah that brings a curse but failing to follow Torah. The passage that Paul quotes from in Deuteronomy continues explaining the blessings for following Torah.

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 NKJV 1 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the LORD your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the LORD your God:

The problem in following the Torah is that no one is fully able to follow it. David writes in the Psalms about the man whose sins are not counted against him.

Psalms 32:1-2 NKJV 1 <<A Psalm of David. A Contemplation.>> Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, Whose sin is covered. 2 Blessed is the man to whom the LORD does not impute iniquity, And in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Paul continues in Galatians to explain that those who are just or righteous live by faith and apparently contrasting it with living by Torah.

Galatians 3:11-12 NKJV 11 But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." 12 Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them."

Verse twelve seems to be saying that since the law is not of faith, we shouldn't live by it because no one is justified by the law. This contradicts so much of what Paul says elsewhere including in Romans 6:1-2:

Romans 6:1-2 NKJV 1 What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? 2 Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it?

In order to understand Paul, we need to look at the verse Paul is quoting.

Leviticus 18:5 NKJV 5 'You shall therefore keep My statutes and My judgments, which if a man does, he shall live by them: I am the LORD.

What does it mean that if a man does them, he will live by them? The Jewish Targumim or paraphrases of the scriptures elaborate on this verse. In Targum Yonaton it reads:

And you shall keep my statutes and the order of my judgments, which if a man do he shall live in them, in the life of eternity, and his position shall be with the just.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Targum implies that it is not just outwardly keeping the commandments, but the act of living them that ensures a position with the just. This is in fact the Jewish understanding of the verse Paul quoted in Habakkuk. Lancaster tell us in The Holy Epistle to the Galatians, that the sages write in Makkot 24a that six hundred thirteen laws are too many to keep track of, so Isaiah simplified it to six principles in Isaiah 13:13-14. Then Micah simplified it to three principles. Finally Habakkuk simplified all six hundred thirteen commandments to one simple principle, "The just shall live by faith."^{iv}

If the phrases "the just shall live by faith" and "they shall live by them" are both actually referring to faith, what does Paul mean that the "law is not of faith?" In the context of Galatians, he is probably referring to those same people who are of the "works of the law" who teach that converting to Judaism is necessary for salvation. Paul is saying that even the Jews attain eternal life by faith and not by the status of being Jewish.

At this point in his discourse, Paul turns back to his earlier statement that justification is through the faithfulness of Yeshua by describing Yeshua's faithfulness.

Galatians 3:13-14 NKJV 13 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"), 14 that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Paul quotes Deuteronomy about the disposition of the body of one who is put to death because of a crime.

Deuteronomy 21:22-23 NKJV 22 "If a man has committed a sin deserving of death, and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, 23 "his body shall not remain overnight on the tree, but you shall surely bury him that day, so that you do not defile the land which the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance; for he who is hanged is accursed of God.

A superficial reading would have us understand this verse as saying that the execution was by hanging. However, a careful reading tells us that the man is put to death and then hung on a tree. This practice of hanging the dead criminal on a tree displays the results of sin. It also serves as a confirmation that justice was done and as a warning against sin. Paul testified to the Galatians in Acts 13:28-29 that Yeshua did nothing to warrant being put to death. Isaiah tells us that the Messiah becomes accursed for us.

Isaiah 53:4-6 NKJV 4 Surely He has borne our griefs And carried our sorrows; Yet we esteemed Him stricken, Smitten by God, and afflicted. 5 But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; The chastisement for our peace was upon Him, And by His stripes we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.

Yeshua's very public death does serve as a confirmation that justice was accomplished. He paid the death penalty for all who have sinned. And it serves as both a warning against sin and a hope for those who have sinned that justification is available through the faith of Yeshua! Justification does not come through circumcision for the Gentile. It does not come through Jewish identity for the Jew. It does not come through any act of observing the Torah whether the person is a Jew or a Gentile. It is through Yeshua that the promise to Abraham to bless all the nations through him is met. Justification comes through our belief that through Yeshua's death and resurrection we obtain forgiveness of sins and eternal life.

Study Questions:

1. The theologian Matthew Poole describes "dead to the law" in Galatians 2:19 as meaning dead to any expectation of being justified by obedience to it. Do you agree? Why or why not?
2. In Galatians 3:4, Paul asks if the Galatians have suffered in vain. What is he referring to? How does it relate to the Galatians' attempts to be "made perfect by the flesh"?
3. In Galatians 3:8, Paul says that the "scripture" preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham. What does Paul mean?
4. Paul uses the phrase "the just shall live by faith" in Galatians 3:11. Where else is this phrase used? What does it mean in each case? Does it agree with the writing in Makkot 24a that this phrase summarizes the whole Torah?
5. Leviticus 18:5 says that If a man does the commandments, he will live by them. What, if anything, is the difference between doing the commandments and living by them?
6. What new insight did you gain from this teaching? How do you respond to this new insight? How will you realign your life based on this new understanding?

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ⁱ Lancaster, D.Thomas. The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach. First Fruits of Zion. ©2014. P93.

ⁱⁱ Poole, Matthew. Commentary on the Holy Bible.

ⁱⁱⁱ Lancaster, D.Thomas. The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach. First Fruits of Zion. ©2014. P149.

^{iv} Lancaster, D.Thomas. The Holy Epistle to the Galatians: Sermons on a Messianic Jewish Approach. First Fruits of Zion. ©2014. P150..