

# NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023 am SERIES "The life of faith" Part 1

TEXT: Galatians 2 v 15 > 3 v 9

## Scripture references from the ESV

**Galatians 2:15-3:9** We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup> yet we know that a person is not justified<sup>[b]</sup> by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup> But if, in our endeavour to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup> For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup> For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup> **I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.** <sup>21</sup> I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness<sup>[c]</sup> were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified. <sup>2</sup> Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? <sup>3</sup> Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by<sup>[a]</sup> the flesh? <sup>4</sup> Did you suffer<sup>[b]</sup> so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain? <sup>5</sup> Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith— <sup>6</sup> just as Abraham "believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"? <sup>7</sup> Know then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. <sup>8</sup> And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify<sup>[c]</sup> the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In you shall all the nations be blessed." <sup>9</sup> So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Conservationists use 'prescribed fires' to clear the forest floor of excess vegetation that might help a wild fire to take hold easily. They are fighting a wild fire with controlled fire. We need to do the same when it comes to our Christian lives. If we are going to live as God expects us to live, and that should be the desire of all of us, then

**We need to fight the fire of misplaced faith with the fire of faith in the promises of God**

**We need to fight against belief in Satan's lies with belief in God's truth**

Without faith in Christ and his promises:

- the wild fires of temptation to sin, doubt in God's goodness and Satan's accusations will rage through our souls, destroying our joy, peace and patience and leaving us irritable, bitter and confused.

We will find ourselves continually falling into the cycle of sin, guilt and confession, living joyless lives because we cannot see how God is good in every circumstance that we face. We will be weighed down by Satan's accusations.

### **The Christian life is a life of faith**

We can see this as we look at various scriptures -in particular:

- **And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.**  
(Hebrews 11:6)
- **For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin** (Romans 14:23)

If you are going to please God, then faith is essential, and, devastatingly, whatever good things you might do, you are acting sinfully if you are not motivated and empowered by faith. The good things might be really good, but if they don't proceed from faith, it is sin.

**If it is impossible to please God without faith, and whatever does not proceed from faith is sin,**

**then we need to live by faith in Jesus Christ.**

Faith in Jesus Christ is not just how we begin our Christian life. It is the way we continue to live it. Paul shows this in v20 (above). He has told us in the earlier verses that a person is justified through faith alone in Christ alone. We are declared righteous by God, not through keeping the law of God, but through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. None of us are able to perfectly keep God's law, and no amount of trying will put right the wrong we have done. The only person who has perfectly obeyed God's law is Jesus, and when we put our trust in him, Jesus' righteousness is credited to us.

**With our sin taken away through his death, and his righteousness credited to us,  
God sees us as if we had never sinned**

That might imply that it does not matter how we live, but Paul shows that justification is not some legal fiction in which a man's status before God is changed while his character is left untouched, summing that up in v19 (above). A person who has been justified by God will be a completely new person:

**A person who now lives to the glory of God, and to his praise and honour.**

**A person who lives to make God his treasure**

- You cannot say you have been justified by God and then **not** be concerned for his glory and honour, and desire to have God no matter the cost.
- If you are not concerned for God's glory and honour, then you need to ask what is wrong in your heart.

Paul goes on to show two ways in which our lives are changed (v20 above).

1. **Paul shows us our standing as believers.** Throughout the New Testament, we are given two historical facts which are central to the Christian faith – Jesus died and Jesus lives. Paul states this in v20, and there are eyewitness records of this in the Bible.

However, to Paul, these are more than just historical events. He presents the death and resurrection of Jesus as something into which believers have entered. Paul's faith in Christ is not just a belief in some facts about him but is a faith that has united him to Christ in a deeply personal relationship. Being a Christian is about having the life of God in our soul, and Paul demonstrates this here. Faith in Jesus is much more than intellectually agreeing with facts.

- This faith unites us to Christ so that when he died on the cross, we died with him
- This faith unites us to Christ so that now, as the living Saviour of his people, he makes our hearts his home

This is a faith that unites us so that we feel the depth of his love for us.

None of this applies to any other historical figure. The nearest we get to this in human relationships is the union of a man and a woman in marriage. Two people are joined together in the mysterious one flesh union of marriage, which has been given to us by God to help us understand the union between Christ and his people.

Trusting in Jesus unites you to him so that you can make these astonishing statements:

- I have been crucified with Christ. When he dies on the cross, he did not just die for me, but I died with him
- He, being resurrected to life, lives not just in some heavenly realm, but in me.
- I know as a fact that he loved me and gave himself for me, but more than that, I feel the weight of that love in my heart.
- This is something deeply personal – do you have that experience?

**Through faith in Christ, you have the very life of God in your soul.**

## You are united to Christ.

**2. Paul shows us our responsibility as believers (v20).** In the light of our standing, our responsibility is to live by faith in the Son of God. As we daily trust in Christ and his promises, his life in us is lived out.

As we continue to trust in him, we discover that sin is burned up and we become more and more like Jesus. Often, we understand that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, but then say to ourselves that we must work at our sanctification. That is true in one sense, but in fact our sanctification is the result of our ongoing trust in Jesus Christ. Otherwise, our striving to sanctify ourselves without faith in Christ is sin (**Romans 14:3** quoted above).

How does this work? The conservationist referred to at the start severed the fuel of wild fires by burning it up with a controlled fire. That is how faith in Christ and his promises works!

The root of sin is faith in Satan's lies or unbelief in God's promises. Hebrews 3:13 warns: **exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.**

Sin deceives us. It makes false promises, and when we believe the false promises, we fall into sin. John Piper says: No one sins out of duty. We sin because we believe the deceitful promises that sin makes.

Satan questioned God's word to Adam and Eve, undermining what God had said and lying to them. He offered them an alternative that felt really tempting – if you want to be like God, then eat the fruit that gives knowledge of evil as well as good and you will know what God knows and be like him.

It was a lie. They were already created in the image of God. Eating the fruit made humanity less like God, not more like him. The deceitfulness of sin meant that Adam and Eve believed the lie rather than the truth that God had spoken.

- That is how sin continues to operate. It makes promises that sound tempting but are lies.

**We fight against belief in Satan's lies with belief in God's truth.**

Jesus did exactly that when he was tempted by Satan with the deceitfulness of sin. Satan told him that he did not need to go to the cross in order to get what he came for, because he, Satan, could give it to him. It was lies from the father of lies. In his humanity, Jesus fought against the lie by believing in what God had said and fighting back with God's words.

**Jesus fought the wildfires of Satan's lies with the fire of faith in the truth of God's word.** Paul wants us to grasp that, as those who are united to Christ and have him living in us, the way we experience the power of his life in us is the same way that he lived on earth.

**We counter the wildfires of Satan's lies with the fire of faith in the truth of God's word.** What would that look like in our lives? An example of how it would work out is when we display

- Gentleness in the face of hostility

A distinctive mark of Christians should be gentleness. Our culture seems more and more hostile and angry. We cannot change our culture, so how do we deal with a person who starts shouting at us or making false accusations against us?

The wildfire of Satan's lies tells us to give them like for like, even quoting the Bible when it says an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Satan's lies tell us we will feel so much better if we stand up for ourselves and shout back.

There are two problems with this.

**a) The wildfire of lies will only lead to a wildfire that destroys:**

- Your relationship with that person or the communities you both belong to
- Your reputation as a Christian and the testimony of Christ
- Your joy and peace and leaves you bitter

James writes: **the tongue is a small thing that makes grand speeches. But a tiny spark can set a great forest on fire. <sup>6</sup> And among all the parts of the body, the tongue is a flame of fire. It is a whole world of wickedness, corrupting your entire body. It can set your whole life on fire, for it is set on fire by hell itself. (NLT)**

The lie of Satan does not lead to gentleness.

**b) Giving the other person a piece of our mind does not honour God.**

- It does not honour God as being trustworthy
- It does not honour God as being able to strengthen us against sin.

**What honours God is when we fight the wildfires of Satan's lies with the prescribed fire of God's truth.**

When Jesus was wrongly accused, shouted at and treated with scorn, he did not believe the lie of Satan but instead believed the promise of God. That promise is that God will judge the world with justice, and so would one day deal justly with those who were treating him so badly.

Faith in the promise of God freed Jesus to speak with gentleness, rather than shouting back. At the time when everything had been taken away from him and everyone was against him, Jesus was able to speak gracious words of forgiveness and loving kindness. Peter described it thus (1 Peter 2:21-23):

**For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps. <sup>22</sup> He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth. <sup>23</sup> When he was reviled, he did not revile in return; when he suffered, he did not threaten, but continued entrusting himself to him who judges justly.**

When we believe the promise of God that he will deal justly with every injustice, the Spirit of Christ in us sets us free.

- It frees us to speak with gentleness rather than shouting back
- It frees us to love and be happy rather than becoming bitter

**We fight the wildfires of Satan's lies with the prescribed fire of God's promises.**

We see this concept throughout scripture, and we can apply this in every facet of our lives. Next week we will be looking at how can we develop a heart that fights in this way, and other areas of our lives where we can apply this.

- If you are not a believer, you will never achieve this so seek to come to the place of trusting in Christ.
- If you are a believer then you are united to Christ in this indissoluble mysterious union.

**Jesus Christ lives in you and you live out his life in you by trusting in the promises of God.**

**That is how Jesus lived here on earth and it is how he continues to live here on earth as he lives his life through us.**