

Text: Gal. 3:1-6

Title: "Understanding your justification"

Time: 3/24/2019 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Have you ever heard the axiom, "No doubt, the trouble is with you"? I had the privilege of attending Bob Jones University in my college days, and this phrase was one of those that we students there came to appreciate as the school-founder's chapel sayings.

In a chapel talk titled, "The trouble is with you," Dr. Bob said: "Whenever I find the complainer, a grumbler, a griper, there's always something wrong with him." He goes on to describe how in the founding of the University, one of the things they had to lay down were codes of conduct for the student body. He relates how the first rule they came up with for the school was "Constructive suggestions appreciated, griping not tolerated."

He told the story of a man who complained about everything and said that nothing was right. He would look at a pumpkin and say it was too big for its vine, and then he would look at the acorn and say it was too small for its tree. He said he would have put the acorn on the pumpkin vine and the pumpkin in the oak tree. Just then an acorn fell down and hit him on the head. So at least when it comes to the trouble we think we see in God's design of creation, "No doubt, the trouble is with us."

Paul indicates that the same is true for any trouble we may have with the way God has designed for sinners to be justified. Remember that to be justified is to have your legal problem with God's law forever removed. A few things troubled the Galatian churches in this regard. A false gospel was troubling them, propounded by false teachers who troubled them. Pressure from men from James troubled them, as did the troubling compromises of Peter and Barnabas. There was a lot of false-gospel trouble coming at these churches externally.

But in this passage Paul brings them back to that truth that Bob Jones Sr. used to preach so well, “No doubt, the trouble is with you.” Their trouble with the true gospel was that they had lost something of their understanding of the nature of their own justification, and they should have known better than to fall to this temptation. They were forgetting how their legal problem was solved.

We need to be doctrinally clear on what God has done for us if we are going to be healthy spiritually. Our *Foundations* studies begin with the chapter on salvation for this reason. We might be tempted to say, “I am already saved – I don’t need that.” But the example of the Galatians teaches us that we all do need ongoing instruction about our salvation. Notice this morning three keys to understanding correctly our justification this morning.

I. Understand your justification by knowing where confusion about it comes from (v.1).

Illustration: I listened to a talk given at Virginia Tech by a former abortion-providing doctor. He is now pro-life, and he gave no obvious indication in the talk that he was a Christian, but he did describe his journey from being pro-choice to becoming pro-life. He said his mind began to change when his 5-year-old daughter was struck by a car and died. After that, it became harder and harder for him to perform an abortion. It was harder and harder for him to distinguish between the death of his daughter and the deaths of the babies he was destroying in their mothers’ wombs. Today, the doctor has a hard time understanding how he could have done what he did. How could he have been so confused?

Application: Stories like that teach us that there is a kind of confusion in the world that is very hard to account for in terms of the rules of logic and mathematical equations. A believer’s confusion over the true nature of justification is that kind of confusion. It is confusion caused by two spiritual realities that Paul identifies in this passage:

(1) Confusion about our justification comes from our natural foolishness (v. 1a). The word translated *foolish* here means *unthinking*. Many religions today encourage people to think less and to experience more. Biblical Christianity never tells us to do that. We worship our Savior in Spirit and in truth. We do not dumb down truth so that our spirit can be freer to worship.

The word Paul uses to describe the unthinking foolishness of the Galatians here describes the spiritually depraved darkness we experienced before we were saved by Christ (Tit. 3:3, "For we ourselves also were sometimes *foolish*, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.").

It can be used as the opposite of the word *wise* to indicate uneducated or uncultured people (Rom. 1:14, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the *unwise*.").

But it is also a word that Jesus used to describe disciples who were ill-informed about what the Bible says (Luke 24:25, "Then he said unto them [two disciples], O *fools*, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken: Ought not Christ to have suffered these things, and to enter into his glory? And beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.").

Here the Lord explains to these for whom He died that their foolishness involved a slowness of heart to believe all that the prophets had spoken. His correction for this kind of foolishness was to expound the Scriptures for them. That is why we are all here in our Bibles this morning. We have a dangerous unthinking foolishness that needs to be corrected by the Word of God.

(2) Confusion about our justification comes from the one who bewitches people (v. 1b). This is the only occurrence in the NT of the word *bewitched*. It referred in the ancient world to the casting of a spell on someone through an evil eye. The answer to Paul's question, "Who hath bewitched you?", of course, is one he

answers in passages like 1 Tim. 4:1-5, “seducing spirits and doctrines of devils.”

Paul was especially shocked that these Galatian churches could be bewitched in this way, because the significance of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ had been made clear before their very eyes. Paul had heard the testimony of their baptism. He may have even had them write it down. He knew what he had preached clearly to them and how they once had understood it. And now, it is like the enemy had cast a spell over them.

Illustration: I grew up in a good local church and attended a Bible-believing Christian school. I made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ as a boy, and my home was a Christian home. All my life Jesus Christ has been set before my eyes as the crucified one, the one who died for my sins so that I could be forgiven. I often think of the testimony of my mother to me of this truth. How inexcusable would confusion over justification be for me!

Was there not a day when Jesus Christ was plainly portrayed before your eyes as crucified for your sins? If you have never seen that before, let me tell you plainly that He has been crucified for your sins. Today can be the day of your salvation.

But if we have seen it before, how can we experience confusion over our justification when the Holy Spirit had once made it so very clear to us from God’s Word? We need to understand the foolishness of our sinful nature and the bewitching power of the enemy of our souls to our destruction to avoid this confusion about the true nature of our justification before God’s law. Working hard at a *Foundations* study with an older brother or sister in Christ can help with this need.

II. Understand your justification by remembering what God did for you (vv. 2-5).

Illustration: It is a blessing when our kids come home from school for spring break. If you have been to school you know that students have to take tests, and tests can have different kinds of

questions. For me, the simplest kind of questions on any test were the yes or no questions, and the second most simple kind of question was multiple choice.

Application: Paul wants these believers to understand their justification by remembering what God had done for them, and he asks them about that with four simple questions – a multiple-choice question (v. 2), two yes-or-no questions (vv. 3-4), and one final multiple-choice question (v. 5). Let's take them one at a time and apply Paul's test to ourselves.

1. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? (v. 2).

When Paul asks about how a person receives the Holy Spirit, he is asking about how the Christian life begins. Reception of the Spirit in this sense is receiving His work of regeneration or the new birth. Before this happens to someone, he is spiritually dead in his trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1). No man, woman, or child is exempt from this condition of original sin. We have not always believed. We have not always been a good person. We have not always been saved. We were dead in our trespasses and sins.

But then we were quickened or made alive (Eph. 2:5). What Paul is asking the Galatian believers is "When that happened to you, when you knew you were forgiven and now in possession of eternal spiritual life, was it because you have finally obeyed the law perfectly?" Of course not. It was because we had finally listened with the hearing of faith. We finally heard what it was that Christ did for us, and we responded by faith.

2. Having begun in the Spirit, are you now made perfect (finished) by the flesh? (v. 3).

Here we are getting closer to the problem of the Galatian confusion. They new that they were saved by the Holy Spirit when they were lawbreakers, but now they were being taught that in order to stay justified, we have to do so through the works of the flesh. They were concluding that although the Holy Spirit started

our justification, in order for it to be completed, our own human effort and strength has to be employed.

Paul provides the true-gospel answer in Phil. 1:6, where he uses the same vocabulary as he speaks of how the Christian life is begun and finished: "Being confident of this very thing, that He (the Holy Spirit) who began a good work in you will perform (finish) it until the day of Jesus Christ." Our justification began in the Spirit and it is completed in the Spirit, not in the flesh.

3. Have you suffered so much in vain? (v. 4).

Galatia was one of the first Gentile regions to be evangelized by Paul and his team. His method for doing so was to enter a Jewish synagogue in a Galatian city and preach the gospel there first. Inevitably, the Jews would get mad and cause Paul and those who responded positively to the gospel to suffer (see Acts 13:45 (Pisidian Antioch), 14:5 (Iconium), 14:19 (Lystra)). What Paul wants to know now as these Galatians are beginning to compromise with a false gospel more acceptable to these synagogues is, "Was all that suffering for nothing?"

Coming to Christ in response to the true gospel normally involves persecution and suffering of some kind. We love our families more, but they can love us less because of our new faith in Christ. We have friends who do not understand why we no longer do the things we used to do and who begin to distance themselves from us for that reason. The religious expectations that were once a part of our lives, especially in a Judaism or a Roman Catholicism, now become fundamentalist Baptist of all things. Our sufferings, of course, are not in the same category as those of Paul and the Galatians, but for all of us there is a cost to come to Christ. Was all that vain? God says, "No."

4. Did the miracles you have seen come through works of the law or the hearing of faith? (v. 5).

Illustration: At our men's prayer meeting Tuesday morning, one of our brothers reflected in his prayer how a year ago he had no

idea that he would a year later be praying with brothers in Christ on a Tuesday morning. That was a reminder to me of the truth that the fact that any of us were there praying was an unimaginable miracle.

How did that miracle happen in the lives of those praying men? Paul wants to know. Did they suddenly become perfect law-keepers? They would tell you, "No, not at all." God does these miracles through the hearing of faith.

Perhaps the miracle Paul remembers as he writes verse 5 is the one in Lystra recorded by Luke in Acts 14:6-10. What produced that healing? Did Paul say to the lame man – "You need to stop lying and stealing and dishonoring your mom and dad"? No, he saw that the man was listening in faith, so he just said to him in a loud voice, "Be healed!" And so he leaped and walked.

When we stop to consider what God did for us in saving us, and that He did so with the hearing of faith and not the works of the law, we realize that we have no excuse for any confusion about the true nature of our justification. It is by faith alone, not works.

III. Understand your justification by believing what the Bible says about it (v. 6).

Application: If we were to ask the apostle Paul, "What does the Bible say about justification?", he would have responded with this verse, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him for righteousness." No room for works of the law in that verse, only the hearing of faith.

Conclusion: Have you listened this morning with the hearing of faith? Hopefully, you would not claim to be guiltless in the works of the law. Hopefully, you know that you have loved self, not God supremely, nor others before yourself. Hopefully, you understand that your tongue is a lying tongue, your eyes are adulterous eyes, your heart is a discontented covetous heart. But then hopefully you also see Christ crucified for your sins this

morning. Call on the name of the Lord, and you will be saved. Justification before God's holy law comes by the hearing of faith, and not by the works of the law.

“A man came – I think it was actually in Philadelphia – on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, ‘Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.’ That is the distinction – the sermon, and the ‘lightning and the thunder.’ To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters.”

– David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

*Preachers and Preaching*