

Sabbath School Lesson #4 – Justification by Faith – 21-27 October 2017

Christ has given us His life by which we are justified. The passage of our study this week is Romans 3:19-28: “Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in His blood, to declare His righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; to declare, I say, at this time His righteousness: that He might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.”

“What the Law Saith” – The voice of the law is the voice of God. The law is the truth, because it was spoken with God’s own voice through His Son [at Mount Sinai, Jesus spoke in the name of His Father (Deuteronomy 18:18-19), speaking His “Father’s commandments” (John 15:10), as He always spoke for His Father (John 12:49-50) the law of God that was in His heart (Psalms 40:8)]. In the covenant which God made with the Jews concerning the Ten Commandments, He said of the law, “Now therefore, if ye will obey My voice” (Exodus 19:5). The commandments were spoken “in the mount out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud, and of the thick darkness, with a great voice” (Deuteronomy 5:22). Therefore when the law of God speaks to a man, it is God Himself speaking to that man. Satan has invented a proverb, which he has induced many people to believe, to the effect that ‘the voice of the people is the voice of God.’ This is a part of his great lie by which he causes many to think themselves above the law of God. Let every one who loves the truth, now substitute for that invention of Satan the truth that the voice of the law of God is the voice of God.

Every Mouth Stopped – The law speaks that “every mouth may be stopped.” So every mouth would be, if men would only consider that it is God that is speaking. But when the law is read, it is the voice of God now just as much as it was to the Israelites who stood at the base of Sinai. Men often open their mouths against the law now, but the time will come when all men, and every mouth, will be stopped, because “our God shall come, and shall not keep silence” (Psalms 50:3).

No Justification by the Law – “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” One of two things must be the case whenever the law justifies man: either he is not guilty or the law is a bad law. Neither of these is true in this case. God’s law is perfectly righteous, and all men are sinners. “By the law is the knowledge of sin.” It is obvious that a man cannot be declared righteous by the same law that declares him to be a sinner. It is a self evident truth that by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified. As all have sinned, the law must continue to declare them guilty, no matter what their future life might be. No man can ever do more than his duty to God, and no possible amount of good deeds can undo one wrong act. But more than this, men have not only sinned, but they are sinful. “The carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be” (Romans 8:7). “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary the one to the other; so that ye can not do the things that ye would” (Galatians 5:17). Hence, no matter how much a man may try to do the righteousness of the law, he will fail to find justification by it.

Righteousness without the Law – If any man ever has righteousness he must get it from some other source than the law. If left to themselves and the law, men would truly be in a deplorable condition. But here is hope. The righteousness of God without the law or apart from the law, is manifested in Jesus Christ. He Himself said through the prophet David: “I delight to do Thy will, O My God; yea, Thy law is within My heart. I have preached righteousness in the great congregation; lo, I have not refrained My lips, O Lord, Thou knowest” (Psalms 40:8-9). Righteousness which is manifested apart from the law is the righteousness of God. No one need fear that he will be wrong if he has that righteousness! To seek His righteousness is required of us in this life (Matthew 6:33).

“By Faith of Jesus Christ” – In another place Paul expresses his desire when the Lord comes to be found “not having mine own righteousness which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith” (Philippians 3:9). Here again we have “the faith of Christ.” Further, it is said of the saints, “Here are they that keep the commandments of

God, and the faith of Jesus” (Revelation 14:12). God is faithful (1 Corinthians 1:9). Christ is faithful, for “He abideth faithful” (2 Timothy 2:13). God deals to every one a measure of faith (Romans 12:3; Ephesians 2:8). He imparts to us His own faithfulness. This He does by giving us Himself. So that we do not have to get righteousness which we ourselves manufacture; but to make the matter doubly sure, the Lord imparts to us in Himself the faith by which we appropriate His righteousness. Thus the faith of Christ must bring the righteousness of God, because the possession of that faith is the possession of the Lord Himself. This faith is dealt to every man, even as Christ gave Himself to every man. Do you ask what can prevent every man from being saved? Nothing, except the fact that all men will not keep the faith. If all would keep all that God gives them, all would be saved.

No Boasting – Since righteousness is a free gift of God through Jesus Christ, it is evident that no one can justly boast of any righteousness that he has. “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast.” “Who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?” (Ephesians 2:8-9; 1 Corinthians 4:7). What does boasting prove? “Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him; but the just shall live by his faith” (Habakkuk 2:4). Boasting is an evidence of a sinful heart. “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). Yes, the grace and power of God is manifested in Christ to cleanse and keep us from sin, but only when in humility we first acknowledge that we are sinners. “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). When we say that we have no sin, that very thing is evidence that we have; but when with faith in the word of the Lord we say that we are sinners, then the blood of Christ cleanses us from all sin. If cleansed, it is not us, but Christ in us be glorified, hence no boasting. In the plan of salvation there is no place for boasting – boasting is satanic (Ezekiel 28:16-17). If the saints after their translation should begin to boast of their sinlessness, they would be as bad as they ever were. But that will never be, for those admitted to heaven will have learned the lesson that God is all and in all. All will but praise: “Unto Him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and His Father; to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever” (Revelation 1:5).

The Law of Works – The law of works is the Ten Commandments in form only. Compliance with the law of works enables one to appear outwardly righteous, but corrupt within. Yet the one who follows the law of works is not always necessarily a hypocrite. He may have an earnest desire to keep the commandments, but may be deceived into thinking that he can work them out of himself.

The Law of Faith – This has for its object the same thing as the law of works, namely, the commandments of God, but the result is different. The law of works deceives a man with a form; the law of faith gives him the substance. The law of faith is the law “as it is in Jesus.” The one may be a sincere attempt to keep the law; the other is the actual accomplishment of that desire, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. The Ten Commandments as given by the Lord are only a law of faith, since God never designed that they should be taken in any other way; and He never expected that anybody could get righteousness from them in any other way than by faith. The law of works is man’s perversion of the law of God. “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” Because there is no other means by which he could be justified! We have before seen that all men are sinners, and that no man has power in himself to perform the deeds of the law, no matter how strong his desires. “Not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified” (Romans 2:13). But “by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight; for by the law is the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). Therefore whoever is justified, or made righteous at all, must be made righteous by faith alone, wholly apart from the deeds of the law. This is of universal application. It means that justification, first, last, and all the time, is by faith alone. The Christian cannot be justified by works any more than the sinner can be. No man can ever get so good and strong that his own deeds can justify him. But that is not to say that works have nothing to do with faith. Justification means making just, or making righteous. Righteousness is right doing. Faith which justifies, therefore, is faith which makes a man a doer of the law, or, rather, it is the faith which puts the doing of the law into him. “For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). “It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure” (Philippians 2:13). Thus, “This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly. That they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works” (Titus 3:8). In conclusion, a man is not justified by faith and works, but by faith alone, which works.