

concludes this entire discussion by showing that God must be both "just" and the "justifier" of those who believe (v.26). A just God must condemn sin. A merciful God would forgive sin. He condemned sin in His Son who kept perfectly the law thus justifying God's requirement. Then in justice He made Jesus to become sin to die on the cross and be raised from the dead. In His Son, therefore, He became the "justifier" of all who would believe in Jesus as their Saviour. This He did, not on the basis of your good works, but as an act of His grace (v.24).

In this light you can understand Peter's sermon to Cornelius wherein he traced the life of Jesus from His baptism to His resurrection (Acts 10:36-41), and even beyond to the day of judgment (v.42).

As Peter uttered the words "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins," his sermon was interrupted by the coming of the Holy Spirit falling "on all them which heard the word" (v.44). The word "heard" means to hear and heed.

Thus Cornelius and his household *believed* the Gospel. The Holy Spirit came upon them, before baptism, as a sign that God had saved them (vv.45-48) as Gentiles—by grace through faith.

In conclusion we summarize our theme: God is no respecter of persons. All of you outside of Christ are lost, either because you reject God's law written in the Bible or written within your heart. God does not save some men by one way and others by another. He has one plan of salvation. It is by grace through faith in Jesus Christ whose saving death and resurrection are available to every one of you. "Whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins" (Acts 10:43).

I beg of you to turn from your efforts to establish your own righteousness by deeds of the law. Accept the righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus. Whatever your race or moral condition you must be "justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:24). For God does not judge you by your face but by your heart!

JUSTIFICATION THROUGH FAITH

May 24, 1959

Scripture: Acts 13:14-43

"And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses"—Acts 13:39

While the apostle Paul had preached many times before this, we have here the first of his sermons recorded in full outline. For that reason we note several of its characteristics. It was preached on the Sabbath day in the Jewish synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia. In Acts when Christians met as Christians it was always on the Lord's Day, the first day of the week. But when Paul sought an audience of Jews he always went to their synagogue on their day of worship, the Sabbath, or seventh day of the week. This was probably the first sermon ever preached to a

mixed congregation of Jews and Gentiles. In Acts 13:16 and 43 we learn that there were present Jews; proselytes, or Gentiles who had become Jews in their religion; and God-fearers, Gentiles who were students of Judaism.

Note further that the sermon was preached in a Jewish synagogue located in a Greek city that was under Roman rule. The preacher was a Hebrew, reared in Tarsus, a city of Greek culture, and who was a Roman citizen. Thus in this mixed congregation the three great cultures of the day, Hebrew, Greek, and Roman, united in the proclamation of the Christian Gospel.

Analyzing Paul's sermon you discover that it follows the theme of Stephen's sermon. Apparently Paul never got away

from its impression upon his heart. Through Paul, Stephen being dead, yet continued to speak.

Dr. G. Campbell Morgan points out that two themes run through this sermon: God's government and God's grace. Thus, in rehearsing the history of Israel from Abraham to Jesus, Paul shows how through His government of the nations God has carried forward His purpose of redemptive grace, crowned by the death and resurrection of Jesus. He climaxed his sermon in Acts 13:38-39, "Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."

We would center our message in verse 39. Literally translated it reads, "And from all things which we were not able in the law of Moses to be justified, in this one every one believing is justified." This is a characteristic Pauline sentence, with the principal clause at the end. Around this verse we ask you to consider, first, the limitation of the law; second, the power of the Gospel; third, the result of refusal (v.41).

First, note the limitation of the law. Paul's congregation included those who had grown up under this law, and those out of paganism who sought salvation through its observance. To both Paul declared that it was impossible thereby to be justified before God. Remembering that this is but an outline of Paul's sermon, we assume that he developed this idea thoroughly. If you will study Galatians and Romans you will find Paul's complete dissertation of this truth.

In our message last week we pointed out that in Romans Paul set forth at length the truth that both Jew and Gentile, such as those in his present congregation, had failed to keep God's law: and, therefore, were under condemnation. In Romans 3:19 he said, "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 (Jew and Gentile) may become guilty (answerable in judgment) before God." In the following verse (20) Paul continues in almost the same words that he used in Antioch. "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight . . ."

If this be true, what then is the place of the law? Paul says in Romans 3:20, "For by the law is the knowledge of sin." In Romans 4:15 he adds, "For where no law is, there is no transgression." And if no transgression, then no sin. For I John 3:4 says, "Sin is the transgression of the law." Here is the moral difference between an animal and a man. It is wrong for a lion to stalk and kill a man, but it is not sinful. An animal is neither moral nor immoral. It is a-moral; it has no morals. But for a man to murder another man is sinful. For man, having the law of God either in the Bible or in his heart, is either moral or immoral, according to his response to that law. So by the very existence of the law we have our knowledge of sin.

But, within itself, the law is powerless to cleanse us from sin. However, in Galatians 3:24 Paul says, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The word "schoolmaster" translates the title of a slave whose duty it was to take his master's child by the hand and lead him safely to the school teacher. He did not teach the child. He only took him to the teacher to be taught. If he then refused to learn he could blame neither the teacher nor the schoolmaster, but only himself.

Herein is a vital truth for every one who listens to me. By your standard of righteousness, either the Bible or your conscience, you cannot be justified before God. That law of God is designed only to make you conscious of your sin. The word "sin" means to miss the mark. Missing the mark is not the fault of the target, but of your poor marksmanship. Christ is the

only One who ever hit the target dead center. Every time you miss, the target says, "Why don't you go to Christ? Your only hope to hit the target is to enrol in His school of marksmanship." Through the law the Holy Spirit convicts you of your sin. Whether you submit to Christ is a decision within yourself. But Paul continues to remind you that "by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight."

Second, consider the power of the gospel. In Acts 13:39 Paul says, "And from all things . . . in this one (Jesus) every one believing is justified." In this utterance we have the heart of Paul's Gospel. It has been called the argument of Galatians and Romans in a sentence. We have here the two key words of Paul's theology: *faith* and *righteousness* or justification. In Paul's concept of *faith* the prominent element is the grace of God towards sinners as manifested and pledged in Jesus, particularly in His death and resurrection. It means to trust, to have confidence in, to rely upon Jesus Christ for salvation. *Righteousness* in Paul's concept is a state of being acceptable to God, and is acquired not by works but by faith in that which Christ has done for your salvation.

The theme of Romans is the *God-kind-of-righteousness* versus the *law-kind-of-righteousness*. In Romans 10:3 Paul speaks of the Jews who "being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God." He then adds in verse 4, "For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." To this add Paul's further word in Romans 8:3-4, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." In the above light you can understand Romans 1:16-17. "For I am

not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith . . ."

Let us summarize by saying that the righteousness of God is not an attribute of God. It is an activity of God whereby He picks you up out of the wrong and places you in the right, or declares you righteous, as though you had never been in the wrong. Note that Paul says that it is "from faith to faith"—it is a matter of faith from beginning to end.

Thus you can better understand Paul's words to the congregation in Antioch "By Him all that believe are justified . . ." or declared righteous. Not by the works of the law of Moses, but as a matter of faith from beginning to end.

It is well to recall that Paul's phrase "are justified" is stronger than Peter's favorite phrase "remission of sins" (Acts 2:38). The latter suggests sins that have been committed and then been forgiven. Paul's idea is that a sinner is taken out of sin and declared righteous as though he had never sinned.

What a glorious Gospel to preach to you who have endeavored to achieve righteousness through good deeds only to fail! God in Christ offers you His righteousness as a matter of faith from beginning to end. No matter how great your sin, if you will rely upon God's grace as expressed in the death and resurrection of Jesus, He will pick you up out of your sin and place you down in a state of righteousness as though you had never sinned at all. Does it sound too good to be true? I know a good man, but not a Christian, who told his pastor, "I cannot accept it because it is too easy."

Recently Mrs. Hobbs and I were riding with a man in Hollywood, Calif. Seeing a large white cross standing on a hill, she asked him about it. Misunderstanding as to what she referred, he replied, "That is the freeway." He spoke a greater truth

than he realized. For it is by the cross that God can offer to you the "freeway" to eternal life. It is free to you, but it cost God dearly. Soon we were riding on the freeway. No one stopped us to collect a toll. We simply drove on to it. Now the freeway cost many millions of dollars, but it was ours simply for the using. Our refusal to ride upon it would have been our loss.

Beloved friend, therein is a tremendous truth for you. God in Christ has provided a "freeway" for you. It is yours simply by placing your faith in it. To reject it will be for your eternal damnation. For Romans 1:18 says also that in the Gospel, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness."

Third, note the result of refusal. Paul concluded his sermon with a warning. "Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of the prophets: Behold, ye despisers, and wonder, and perish . . ." Paul's congregation is composed of Jews and Gentiles. In I Corin-

thians 1:23 Paul says, "But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness." The Jews sought salvation through ceremonial works. The Greeks relied upon their abstract philosophical ethics. To the one the "freeway" was a stumbling block; to the other it was foolishness, or moronic, as the word says. Both were "despisers" of the way of salvation offered by God in Christ. No wonder Paul warned, "Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish . . ."

I would leave this solemn truth with you. By your ceremonial deeds and abstract philosophical ethics you cannot be justified. Justification for you will come only through your faith, whereby God will pick you up out of your sin and put you down in His righteousness as though you had never sinned. If you rely upon Him through faith in Jesus you will be saved. If in wonder you despise God's grace you will perish. My prayer to God and my plea to you is that you will enter His "freeway" by the way of the cross!

THE TRAGEDY OF UNBELIEF

May 30, 1959

Scripture: Acts 13:44-48

Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles"—Acts 13:46

It was a time of crisis in the spread of the Christian Gospel. On the previous Sabbath Jews, proselytes, and God-fearers had heard the preaching of Paul in the synagogue of Antioch in Pisidia, requesting that they hear more. Now on the next Sabbath a multitude, including Gentiles with no connection with Judaism, gathered to hear the Gospel. This was too much

for the Jews. So they, filled with jealousy, spoke against Paul's message, contradicting him even with blasphemy. To which Paul and Barnabas replied that since the Jews rejected the Gospel, according to God's word in Isaiah 49:6 they turned to the Gentiles.

Therefore, we ask you to consider this incident under three headings: first, the twofold nature of the message; second, the twofold response to the message; third, the twofold result of the response.

First, note the twofold nature of the message. Careful study reveals that Paul probably based his sermon on Isaiah 49. It is one of the great Messianic chapters of the prophet, wherein he presents the