

Pure by Faith

by Chuck Smith

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith over tradition and the righteousness of God being through faith, not works.

Duration: 46:52

Scripture: Psalm 36:1, Proverbs 1:16, Isaiah 59:7-8, Romans 3:10-11, Romans 3:19-20, Romans 3:23, Colossians 2:16-17

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of letting go of religious traditions and embracing the freedom found in Christ. He highlights how Jesus faced opposition from the Pharisees because he challenged their traditions. The speaker also mentions how Peter, Paul, and Barnabas shared their experiences of God's work among the Gentiles. The sermon concludes with a prayer expressing gratitude for God's grace and a plea to stand firm in the liberty found in Christ.

Transcript

Let's turn to Acts chapter 15. Probably the hardest thing to let go is tradition. And we seem to hang on to tradition almost more than anything else.

And when those traditions are religious traditions, it seems like they have a greater hold on people than does truth. When you have felt that your relationship to God, dependent upon your keeping the rituals, the ordinances, the holy days, the Sabbath days, it is hard to break away from that tradition. And when Jesus came, the problem that he had was that he was breaking their traditions.

And that's where he got into trouble with the Pharisees. And ultimately, it is what caused them to determine that they had to get rid of him. Because he was not keeping their traditions.

He was constantly being rebuked by the Pharisees. And he one day said to them, that you teach for doctrine the traditions of man. And that's what ultimately develops is they teach the traditions of man even above doctrine.

A classic example of course today of churches that follow the traditions of man over the word of God is in the Catholic church. They have officially declared that the church traditions and dogma are equal to the word of God and can be considered the word of God. And traditions are hard to break.

And if you have come from a Catholic family, you know how hard it is for them to see you attending a Bible study or see you attending a church which does not have the ritual and all of the traditional things, the trappings of the Catholic church. It's interesting to me that I have met people who really haven't attended church in years. And yet they consider themselves staunch Catholics.

And you wonder sometimes about that kind of a relationship with God. Is it a genuine and a true relationship with God? Now this of course developed early in the church. The Jews were very bound up in traditions.

They were very bound up in the ordinances of the law, in the rituals of the law. And thus when Jesus came along and presented a new approach to God, approaching God through him, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me.

It was very difficult for the Jews who had been so bound in their traditions to relate to God on the basis of faith. Though it was in their scriptures, it declared that Abraham believed God and God accounted it for righteousness. Yet they could not divorce their minds from a righteousness that dependent upon their keeping the rituals and the ordinances of the law.

So in the Gentile church, there in Antioch, coming fresh without a lot of traditional baggage into the knowledge of Jesus Christ, there was a great liberty in that church in Antioch. Because these Gentiles were not all bound with the traditions of the Jews. And thus they came in and they were born again running really as they just enjoyed this relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Now it was noised abroad and it got down to Jerusalem and the church in Jerusalem that there were these Gentile believers that were not observing the rituals and the ordinances of the law. They weren't circumcised. They weren't keeping kosher as far as their food was concerned.

And so there were certain of the brethren from Jerusalem that went up to Antioch to see if the reports that they were getting were actually so. And when they came and they saw the liberty that the Gentiles had, they began to create problems by intimating that they were on an official mission from the church in Jerusalem to set this church straight. To let the people know that unless they kept the law of Moses, and that would not be the moral law because that doesn't change.

But unless they kept the law of Moses, the traditions, the ordinances, the rituals of the law, unless they were circumcised, they couldn't be saved. It created quite a division. Paul and Barnabas disputed with these fellows.

There were big arguments and they decided finally they would go to the church in Jerusalem and get it settled once and for all. And so the apostles and the elders came together to consider this matter, verse six. The matter of the relationship of the law of Moses to the Gentile believers as well as Jewish believers.

To consider if salvation through faith in Jesus alone was sufficient or is it necessary to keep the ordinances and the rituals of the law. We read, and when there had been much disputing, this was a big issue in the church. A lot of argument over this issue.

In that Mid-Eastern culture, in their disputing, they can get very loud and very demonstrative. And so you can sort of picture in your mind just what was going on. It's often said in Israel by the Jews, if you want three opinions, ask three Jews.

It seems like each of them have their own opinion. And so here is this big dispute that is going on over this issue. So they finally sort of called the meeting to order and Peter was the first one to speak on the subject.

Now earlier, Peter, you remember, was called of God to go to the house of Cornelius, who was a Roman centurion, their ancestry. And the Spirit had told Peter to go, not asking any questions after having given Peter a vision. Peter came to the house of Cornelius.

Cornelius greeted him, he had a house full of people that he had invited to come. And Peter sort of stood at the door I'm sure a little hesitant. He had never been in the house of a Gentile before, because that was against the tradition of the Jews.

Any kind of a concourse with Gentiles was forbidden. You remember the surprise of the woman at Samaria when Jesus asked her for a drink. How is it that you ask me for a drink? You're a Jew, I'm a Samaritan.

We don't deal with each other. And that was very true. The Jews would not deal with the Gentiles.

They would not enter into the home of a Gentile. And I'm sure that Peter probably took a big gulp and stepped inside, because the Spirit had prompted him to do so. And so having been led of the Spirit to take the gospel to the Gentiles, the church in Jerusalem felt that their whole culture was being threatened.

Did you know that this today is one of the greatest fears of the Jews as far as accepting Christianity, accepting Jesus Christ? Their greatest fear is that they will no longer be a nation. Their nation, they feel, is held together by the traditions. And Jews today will observe the Sabbath, though they are not religious.

They will observe kosher diets, though they are not religious. And it's interesting how that they feel that it is the rituals and the ordinances that, the traditions that really hold the people together, make them a nation. And they're fearful that if they accept Christianity, that they will no longer have that bond of camaraderie that is created through the traditions that they observe.

And we have had many a Jew tell us that the reason why they don't accept Jesus Christ is that they would no longer be a Jew and the nation would fall apart. They feel that it is the adhesiveness of the traditions. And yet the same fellows that told us these things are not really religious Jews at all.

But it's just the whole nationalism that is held together by their traditions. Peter spoke of how God called him and that his outreach to the Gentiles was by direct guidance of the Holy Spirit, in order that the Gentiles might hear the gospel and believe. And that God confirmed his going by giving to the Gentiles the Holy Spirit, even as was given to the church in the beginning.

And God had made no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts through faith. As we sang, you know, He is actually brought down the walls. Paul in Ephesians speaks about how that through Jesus Christ, this partition that used to exist between the Jew and Gentile was broken down through Jesus Christ, making us one.

Now Peter is affirming this. He made no difference between them and us, purifying their hearts through faith. Our hearts are purified through faith.

When Paul wrote to the Romans in chapter three on this very subject, he said, what advantage then has the Jew? Or what profit is there in circumcision? Paul said much and in every way, but chiefly because unto them were committed the oracles of God. In other words, God had spoken to them as a nation. And that was the chief advantage of the Jew, is that that was the nation to whom God revealed his plan of redemption, because that was the nation that would bring the Messiah into the world.

And so their chief advantage was the revelation of God to them. They had the oracles of God. Paul then asked, what then, referring to the Jew and the Gentile, are we better than they or the Gentiles? No, in no wise.

For we have before proved that both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin. As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one. There is none that understandeth.

There is none that seeketh after God. They are all gone out of the way. They are all together become unprofitable.

There is none that doeth good, no, not one. So there's no difference between Jew and Gentile. We're all sinners.

There's none righteous, no, not one. Now here he is actually quoting Psalm 53 verses one to three. Then he quotes Psalm 59.

Their throat is an open sepulcher. With their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of asphodel is under their lips.

And then he quotes Psalms 10-7. Whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. And then he quotes Proverbs 1-16.

Their feet are swift to shed blood. And then he quotes Isaiah 59-7-8. Destruction and misery are in their ways.

And the way of peace have they not known. And then Psalm 36-1. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now we know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world become guilty before God. As I read this, I'm amazed at Paul's excellent grasp of the scriptures. As he is writing on this subject just one by one, scriptures out of Proverbs, scriptures out of Psalms, scriptures out of Isaiah.

Now he didn't have a strong concordance. And he wasn't able, you know, to look these things up. But he just had the word of God in his heart.

And he could just quote God's word. And how wonderful it is to have the word of God so permeate your life. That when you get on a subject or an issue, you can just start rattling off scriptures that are all saying basically the same thing, only they're coming from different parts of the Bible.

And so Paul then said, 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. No one has ever become righteous by keeping the law.

The law brings to us the knowledge of sin. And a correct understanding of the law will bring you conviction of sin. Because there is none of us who are righteous, no, not one.

All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. There is none that doeth good. There is none that seeketh after God.

And so as Paul wrote to the Galatians, the law was intended as a schoolmaster to drive us to Jesus Christ. But after you've come to Christ, you're no longer under the schoolmaster. You've attained, you've achieved.

Once you've graduated, you're no longer under the authority of the teacher. What is it? You used to put in your books, no more teachers, no, no, no more school, no more books, no more teachers, dirty looks or something. You're, you're, you know, you can sort of, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'm out of your class.

I've got my grade and it's all over, you know, and, and you don't feel bound to them any longer. And, and so the law, when it has brought you to despair in yourself, when it's brought you the consciousness of your sin, and when it has driven you to Jesus Christ, it has then accomplished its purpose and you are no longer under the law. Now, as I said, we're not talking about the moral law.

That stands. Thou shalt not kill, thou shalt not steal and bear false. That stands.

That's, that's the moral law but we're talking about the law of ordinances and rituals and things of that nature. No longer under that as a standard for righteousness because it couldn't make you righteous. Never could.

Therefore, by the deeds of the law, no flesh will be justified in his sight. For by the law is only the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law or apart from the law is manifested being witnessed by the law and the prophets.

Even the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe for there is no difference. That is, as far as the Jew or the Gentile is concerned, there's no difference. All of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God.

And all of us, both Jew and Gentile, are being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Whom God has set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood to declare the righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God. To declare, I say at this time, his righteousness that he might be just and the justifier of him that believes in Jesus.

Where is boasting then? Well, it's excluded. By what law? Of works? No, if you could be righteous by works, then you would be boasting and you'd have a grounds for boasting. But as Paul said, God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of Jesus Christ.

And so we sing in the cross of Christ I glory. I can't boast of my works. My works do not and cannot make me righteous.

It is my faith in Jesus Christ that God accounts as righteousness for me. So the righteousness which is of God through faith in Christ Jesus, which eliminates boasting. Therefore, Paul said, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also. Seeing it is one God which shall justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. In other words, our righteousness is predicated upon faith in Jesus Christ and not upon a ritual.

And of course, Paul is dealing with the ritual of circumcision, which to the Jew was vital and all important. But that would go for any other ritual, even the ritual of baptism. Now, sometimes people talk about the Pauline doctrine or the Pauline theology as though Paul was sort of a renegade out here all on his own, really not in harmony with the church in Jerusalem, that Paul was just sort of a outcast because he had this gospel of faith and righteousness through faith in Jesus Christ.

And so somehow he was out of harmony with the church, the main church in Jerusalem. But having looked at Paul's statement, let's come back to Peter now as he is standing there before the council. And Peter said, why tempt ye God by putting on them a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear? Why would you tempt God? By making another path to salvation through the law, which was a yoke that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.

Now, he's very honest and straightforward as he talks about the rituals and the ordinances of the law. We weren't able to keep them. If we weren't able to keep them, why should we try to put the Gentiles under these same rituals and ordinances? If God has accepted them and has given to them the gift of the Holy Spirit without their being circumcised, why should we go against what God has done by demanding that they now be circumcised? You know, it's interesting.

There is only one place that I can think of where it speaks of Jesus being angry. That's not really an emotion that we equate with Jesus, is it? When we think of Jesus, we think of kindness. We think of compassion.

We think of love. We think of forgiveness. We think of understanding.

In the 23rd chapter of Matthew, it doesn't say that he was angry there, but his words would certainly tend towards that. But the only place where it says he was angry was when he was coming to the synagogue in Capernaum on the Sabbath day. And there was a man in the synagogue on that Sabbath day who had a withered hand.

And immediately they began to watch him to see if he would heal the man on the Sabbath day. Now, here you find Jesus bucking directly against tradition. Their interpretation of the Sabbath day was that you were to do no healing on the Sabbath day, because they felt that that constituted a work.

So, if a person was bleeding to death, you could tie a tourniquet to stop the bleeding. But you really couldn't try to cleanse the wound or bandage it up or take care of it. Just save the life, but do nothing towards the healing process until the Sabbath day was over.

And they taught that as, you know, this is God's command. And so, Jesus, when he came into the synagogue, he felt the tension rising. And as he looked around, he realized what was going on.

Because he saw the man over there with a withered hand. And he realized that they're wondering if I will heal this man on the Sabbath day. And it said he looked on them with anger.

Why? Because they would keep this man in a crippled condition, because it was the Sabbath day and they did not want to see their traditions violated. And so, they would hold back this man from the work of God in

his life, because it violated their traditions. That's what upset him.

Anytime our traditions get in the way, and we would hold people back from the work that God is wanting to do in their life, because it violates our traditions, it makes him angry. And so, why tempt ye God? Why make God angry? It's obvious God has accepted the Gentiles. Obviously that he has accepted them, because he poured out his Holy Spirit upon them.

So, why should we put them back under these ordinances, back under these rituals, which even we haven't been able to keep? A yoke of bondage Paul calls it, in Galatians. Galatians 5, in Colossians chapter 2, Paul said, Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of a holy day, or of the new moon, or of the Sabbath days, which are a shadow of things to come. The substance is Jesus.

So, what Paul is saying is, all of these ordinances, all of these holidays, the Sabbath day, it was only foreshadowing the coming of Jesus. It was fulfilled in Jesus. The Passover was fulfilled in Jesus.

And so, these were all the shadow of things to come. The substance, the body is Christ, the substance, not the shadow. He's the substance from which the shadow was cast.

But the shadow only speaks of the substance. And so, don't let anybody judge you in regard to these things which were only foreshadowing the coming of Jesus. He is our Sabbath.

He is our rest. We find our rest in Him. Tragic that some people believe that they have to keep the Saturday, Sabbath, in order to be righteous before God.

And they feel that worship on Sunday is a violating of God's laws, and God's commands, and that surely Sunday worship is sort of a, well, they even refer to it as the mark of the beast. And you know that God is letting the tares grow with the wheat, but in the harvest, you know, you that have worshipped on Sunday will be tares. You'll be rooted out and cast out because you've been worshipping the mark of the beast.

Tragic. The same issues that were there at the beginning of the church are still with us today as people are wanting to hang on to traditions and hang on to the ordinances rather than hanging on to Jesus and finding their rest in Jesus Christ. He's the real rest, the true rest.

No one has ever been saved by keeping the law. No one can ever be saved by keeping the law. The law was intended to force us to realize that we are sinners who need the grace of God if we are ever going to be saved.

And even those who offered sacrifices in the Old Testament, they did so by faith as they believed the promises of God that he would send the Messiah. And so their sacrifices were all offered in faith. They weren't saved.

The sacrifices could not put away their sins. The sacrifices could only cover but couldn't put away their sins. That took the blood of Jesus Christ.

So he is the fulfillment. He is the end of the law to those that believe. Why should we put on them a yoke? As Paul said, the yoke of bondage that neither we nor our fathers were able to bear.

When Jesus invited people to come to him, he said, come unto me all ye that labor and are heavy laden and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light and you will find rest for your souls.

You can never rest in the law. The only place you can find rest is in Jesus Christ. And in contrast to the yoke of the law, which Peter said neither we nor our fathers were able to bear, Jesus said, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.

Jesus accused the Pharisees of binding heavy burdens that were hard to bear on the shoulders of the people, but he said they would not lift a little finger to try and move them themselves. But they would put these heavy yokes. Now you see, some of these people who had accepted Jesus were former Pharisees.

And they were still going to do that same thing that they were doing before. As a Jew, as a Pharisee, they would put heavy burdens on people. Requirements that were difficult or impossible to keep.

And yet they themselves wouldn't move a little finger to try and lift the things. And so, Peter is suggesting that we not put the Gentile believers in this kind of a relationship with God. There are always those like the Pharisees who would tell you how you should live, but so many times they don't live that way themselves.

So Peter's final analysis, having spoken of God receiving the Gentiles apart from the ordinances, giving them the Holy Spirit, saw no reason that we should now put them under the bondage, the yoke of the ordinances and rituals of the law. So he finally concludes, we believe that through the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they. Now, I like the way Peter put this.

It was, we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall be saved even as they. He didn't say that they will be saved even as us. He recognized that God had saved them through grace.

And remember now, this is Peter, this isn't Paul. This is typical for Paul. But here is Peter acknowledging that we, Jews, have to come the same way as the Gentiles.

We Jews can be saved through the grace of God, even as the Gentiles have been saved through the grace of God. So he agrees with Paul that salvation for the Jews is no different than salvation for the Gentiles. He acknowledges that we are all of us saved by grace through faith.

No one who has ever lived apart from Jesus deserved to be saved. Only Jesus deserved to be saved because he was sinless. But no one else ever deserved salvation.

There's not a single thing that you can do or a collective group of things that you can do that would cause you to deserve salvation. Salvation is a gift of God's grace unto us. Those that try to say that salvation through grace, by grace through faith, in the Lord Jesus is strictly Pauline, but it isn't.

It is a common consensus in the early church. And we find Peter here in perfect agreement with the teachings of Paul. By grace are you saved through faith.

And that not of yourselves, it's a gift of God and not of works, lest any man should boast. The Jews were saying that you must earn God's favor by keeping the law. Peter is saying you must receive God's favor by believing in him.

You know, to me the Christian life is filled with interesting paradoxes. In the Christian life, the way up is down and the way down is up. He that exalteth himself shall be obeised.

So if you're trying to go up, you'll go down. Exalting yourself, you'll be obeised. But he that humbleth himself, the way up is down, shall be exalted.

The way to victory is by surrendering. When I surrender unto Jesus Christ is when I experience victory. And the way to strength is by my confession of weakness.

For when I am weak, then am I strong. For his strength is made perfect in my weakness. The way to a righteous standing before God is not by my works, my efforts, my doing, but it is what God has done for me and the provisions he's made for me through Jesus Christ and my simple putting my faith and trust in the work of God.

God accounts my faith for righteousness, the righteousness which is of Christ through faith. This is the righteousness that Paul was preaching to the Gentiles. This went against the grain of the Jews because it violated their traditional positions and beliefs.

The church is now considering this very issue, and it is a pivotal issue as far as the church and the future of the church is concerned. Whether the church continues to be an organism that spreads out to the world, or whether it's reduced to just another Jewish sect will be determined by this council. So Peter has put in his two cents worth.

Next up, Paul and Barnabas as they declare what God has done through their ministry to the Gentiles. Let's pray. Father, we're so grateful that you have done it all, and that our righteousness, Lord, is something that you have wrought for us through your Son, Jesus Christ.

Not of works of righteousness which we have done, but Lord, by your grace are we accepted and are we redeemed. And Lord, we as Gentiles rejoice in the freedom, the beautiful freedom that we have in Christ, Jesus. We thank you, Lord, that your yoke indeed is easy, and your burden is light.

And as there are those today, Lord, that would like to put us under the yoke, of the law, under the yoke of bondage. We ask, Lord, that you will help us to stand in the liberty wherein Christ has made us free. Hold our ground, stand fast in that liberty.

In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front this evening to pray for your needs. So as we are dismissed, if you have a need tonight, we encourage you to come forward and just spend some time in prayer.

Take it to the Lord. He is able, He is willing, and He has promised that He would help. If two or three would agree, He said He would do it.

So we would encourage you to come down, and these men are here to agree with you in prayer that God will work in your behalf on those issues that are a problem or troubling you tonight. God wants to work, and we encourage you to just turn it over to Him and give Him a chance to do His work. Sing alleluia to the Lord.

Sing alleluia to the Lord. Sing alleluia, sing alleluia. Sing alleluia to the Lord.

God bless you.

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