

Faith That Works

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon calls believers to return to a faith that relies on Jesus' crucifixion for life and righteousness, rather than on their own efforts or religious practices.

Scripture: Romans 8:6

Topics: "Faith And Works", "Christ Centered Living"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches on the importance of staying rooted in faith and the danger of slipping into self-righteousness. He emphasizes the need to focus on Jesus' crucifixion as the source of divine life and to continually yield to Him, allowing Christ to live and rule within us. The sermon highlights the difference between faith-righteousness, which trusts in God's promises, and self-righteousness, which relies on human effort and rule-keeping.

Transcript

Insights from Galatians

O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified? Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by hearing with faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh? Did you experience so many things in vain? --- if it really is in vain. 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?

Galatians 3:1-5

In the above verses Paul is putting his finger on the difference between a church that is "religious" but spiritually dead, and a church that is alive with the Spirit of God. These Galatian churches once had life and power. Signs of the Kingdom were taking place among them. Healings, changed lives, people were being drawn into God's Kingdom. But now they were merely "religious", now rules and rituals were central.

Where is the power of Jesus' resurrection? Where is the life of the Spirit? Gone! Because they had been "bewitched," sidetracked. They had lost their vision and their life.

So Paul brings them back to square one. "O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus was clearly portrayed as crucified?" Don't you remember? The source of divine life in you is Jesus' death. Nothing else.

Not your prayers.

Not your good deeds.

Not your tears.

Jesus crucified!

Behold the Lamb of God!

Look to him and be saved!

Jesus is atoning for your guilt.

Jesus is taking you down into his death, so that he can raise you to a new life---now, in this life!

That was Paul's message. And it "worked." People listened. People believed. They experienced death and resurrection in their own lives, as the Spirit of God fell upon them and flooded them with the life of God.

But then, as now, it was so easy to get sidetracked. To start out walking in the Spirit, and slip off into our old religious rut.

"If I do this and this and this, I'll be okay."

So then I put my trust in my spiritual discipline. I pray. I read scripture. I get fellowship. And all these disciplines are necessary and good. But they are not the source of our life. They are meant to keep us connected to the cross of Jesus.

But now, look what we're doing: We're putting our trust in our religious discipline itself instead of the Lord Jesus. We need to get back to Square One and take a fresh look at Jesus crucified, and drink in what that awesome event means....and die with him again, so that he can raise us up and live and rule in us.

Having begun in the Spirit, are you now ending in the flesh?

To be in the Spirit means: I trust Jesus. He lives in me. "I am 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 the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." Jesus is the center.

To be in the flesh means: I trust my own piety. I put my faith in my faith. I am the center.

To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God. Romans 8:6-8

"To set the mind on the flesh" simply means "Me."

I'm in charge.

I'm the center of the action.

I'm the mover and shaker.

I'm the victim.

I'm the one whose mistreated.

I'm the one we should all feel sorry for.

I mean, I'm doing all this praying. I try to help people. I come to Bible studies. So why isn't God doing something for me? I'm not getting anywhere!

"To set the mind on the Spirit" means that the foundation of all my thinking is:

"I am 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 the faith of the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

I'm dead. The Spirit of God is my life.

I'm dead. Jesus, who lives in me, thinks in me, loves through me, speaks through me, trusts the Father in me. His faith in the Father rules me from within.

The one thing I have to do---and keep doing---is to set my mind on the Spirit. To keep turning away from "me" to "Him." Every time I catch myself trying to vindicate myself or justify myself, to step down and submit to him.

This is exactly what Jesus is telling us to do, when he says, "I am the Vine, you are the branches.....Your job is to abide in me, so that I can truly abide in you and live my life in you."

"If you abide in me,

If you stay connected to me,

If you let me rule you from that throne within you,

You will have life and peace.

And you will bear fruit."

Thus Abraham "believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So you see that it is men of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, "In thee shall all the nations be blessed." So then, those who are men of faith are blessed with Abraham who had faith.

Galatians 3:6-9

"Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." What does that mean? It means that Abraham did not try to work his way into God's favor, thinking, "If I do this and this and this, God will owe me." Many of us who profess that we're "saved by grace" still fall into the fallacy of thinking God owes us.

"I'm in good shape with God, 'cause I go to church. I read the Bible. I try to help people. I pray."

That's where the Galatians lost their way: "We know what the rules are, and we're keeping them. So God is going to keep us up near the top of the class." Meaning: "I'm depending on myself. I'm the initiator. I'm in

control. I'm working the "kingdom system" and I'm "getting results."

Producing the wrong kind of righteousness: Self-righteousness.

God is looking for faith-righteousness---a new life that God imparts to us as a gift, when we believe, when we take him at his word.

Consider Abraham's faith:

Abraham is an old man. Sarah is an old woman. They have no children.

God appears in a vision. "Don't be afraid, Abraham, I am your shield. Your reward will be great."

"Okay, but I have no heir. My slave will inherit all I have."

"No he won't. You will have a son. Come on outside, I want to show you something.....Look at those stars!

Can you count them? So shall your descendants be!"

Abraham takes that promise into his heart and believes God.

He believes to the point of living by the promise.

That's faith-righteousness.

We need to keep distinguishing between faith-righteousness and self-righteousness.

Faith-righteousness trusts, not in itself, but in God.

It looks, not to itself, but to God.

It acts on God's word with the trust of a child.

Self-righteousness always latches on to a set of rules.

Jewish rules.

Lutheran rules.

Baptist rules.

Catholic rules.

Pentecostal rules.

---and takes pride in keeping them.

And where is God in all this?

Faith-righteousness produces life.

Self-righteousness produces death.

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?

God pours out his Spirit. God works miracles, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, in those who hear him, believe what he says, and act on his word.

Here's a simple approach to a life of faith-righteousness:

1. Listen to the words of Jesus. Keep taking them in, until they are part of you. Believe them. Live them.
2. Invite the Lord Jesus to enter and indwell you, so that he can live his life and incarnate his words in you.
3. Continuously yield to him. Every time you find your will in conflict with his, yield, to him.
4. Deal with the "strongholds" of flesh within you, as the Lord puts his finger on them---an area of your life which you haven't yielded up to him. "After all, it's a good thing. It's an important cause. Why shouldn't I hang on to it.?" But the Lord says, "If you want me to rule within you, give that thing over to me. It's getting in your way. It's feeding your vanity.
5. Repeat the closing verses of Psalm 139 to the Lord who indwells you: "Search me, and know my heart. Try me, and know my thoughts. And see if there be any wicked way in me. And lead me in the way everlasting!"

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