

The Discipleship Project-Summer 2021

Series 2: Standing in Liberty

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Justified by Faith

Series Big Idea

Because in the flesh no one can live up to the high standard of Old Testament law, we must stand in the liberty and grace of the gospel.

Lesson Big Idea

Because in the flesh no one can live up to the high standard of Old Testament law, we must live for God by faith.

FOUNDATION

Scripture Focus: Galatians 3:11 (PPT)

It was not what Abraham thought he would hear. The false gods his family used to serve may have required such a thing, but not the one true God—not the God who had called him out of Ur so many years before. But Abraham knew what he heard the Lord say, even if he didn't understand it. "Take your son, your only son, whom you love—Isaac—and go to the region of Moriah. Sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on a mountain I will show you" (Genesis 22:2, NIV).

Though it didn't make sense to Abraham, he still chose to obey and do as he had been told. He and Isaac, along with a few servants, set out early one morning on the three-day journey. As they approached Moriah, the Lord confirmed they had arrived where the sacrifice was to take place. Abraham took Isaac, and the two of them headed up the mountain.

Little did Isaac know, but he was to be the sacrifice. Then on the way up the mountain, the inquisitive boy turned to his father and questioned him about the sacrifice: "Father? . . . The fire and wood are here, . . . but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Genesis 22:7, NIV). Abraham quietly responded, "God himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering, my son" (Genesis 22:8, NIV).

Upon arriving at the place of sacrifice, Abraham built an altar. Then turning to his almost full-grown son, Abraham began tying his son's hands and told him to lay down on the rocks. Isaac had a choice: he could resist and overpower his father, or he could submit and do what his father had asked. Many had called his father crazy for his faith, but Isaac had seen and heard too much to place that kind of label on his dad. Isaac laid on the altar, closed his eyes, and waited for God to provide, just as his father had said. As Abraham clinched the knife and raised his hand, he heard a familiar voice: "Abraham! Abraham! . . . Do not lay a hand on the boy. . . . Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Genesis 22:11–12, NIV).

In reference to this, James wrote of Abraham: "his faith and his actions were working together, and his faith was made complete by what he did. And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness,' and he was called God's friend" (James 2:22–23, NIV).

FRAME

Paul reminded the Galatians they received the Spirit not by works of the Law, but by hearing of faith (PPT) (Galatians 3:2). His admonishment derived from the fact these Gentile Christians had been swayed

toward the old Mosaic law by Jewish Christians. Historians have called these individuals “Judaizers” since they sought to impose the Mosaic law onto the Gentile Christians. Many speculate as to why the Galatians were easily moved from the gospel of grace to the works of the Law. Perhaps since Jesus came from Jewish lineage, they may have believed that those of Jewish descent had more insight into religion. Paul had been highly educated in the Mosaic law, but he understood how the gospel of grace had eliminated the need for strict adherence to the Law.

In the church today, the practice of holiness—distinguished by keeping certain standards—is frequently labeled as works, or legalism, and not faith. Just like the church in Galatia, some in the church today would forcefully and quickly impose rules upon new believers. We understand this legalistic action is in error to the Word of God because of grace. Any requirement for salvation imposed as an addition to the new-birth experience is contrary to God’s Word.

Church holiness standards are established by the Word of God, and they promote modest holy living in a grandiose unholy world. Standards of dress and behavior help us to be accountable for our actions outside the church and also separate us from the immoral practices of worldly living. Most important, our outward observance of holiness standards should be a reflection of our inward faith in Jesus Christ and the work His redemptive power has in our lives, lest we fall into obligatory actions. We should reflect on Paul’s query when we become focused on our works of holiness, “Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?”

- **Why is Paul’s warning to the Galatians still pertinent to the church today?**

Paul questioned the Galatians about efforts to achieve perfection by human works (PPT) (Galatians 3:3). Human beings are inherently flawed—imperfect. Striving for perfection is an exercise in futility. Paul understood the pointlessness of working to achieve spiritual maturity by human strength. In his not-too-distant past, he had watched and taken part in punishing Jewish believers who had failed to comply with Mosaic law. If humanity could achieve perfection, there would be no need for Calvary. Paul’s question in Galatians 3:3 points out how foolish it is to depart from the Spirit we receive at our conversion, but it is possible. Striving for perfection sets us up for failure, produces discouragement, and thus increases the probability of us walking away from faith all together.

Striving for perfection (spiritual maturity) is a noble pursuit. The writer of Hebrews admonished us to “go on unto perfection” (Hebrews 6:1, KJV). Jesus Himself called us to be perfect (Matthew 5:48). But a pursuit of perfection apart from grace and the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is doomed for failure. Christians often seek to live perfectly according to the standards of holiness found in the Bible and those established by the church according to scriptural principles. Just like with any new habit, such as a diet, we desire to modify our behavior, but when the results do not come quickly, we can become discouraged and fall away. The key is consistency. A consistent time of prayer, study, worship, and fellowship will help maintain continuity in our spiritual lives. Our faith needs to be nurtured in order to grow stronger. Our experience with the infilling of the Holy Spirit is just the start; we must do our part to strengthen and deepen our faith.

- **Why was Paul worried about the Galatians “working” toward perfection?**

Paul reiterated his message of receiving the Spirit not by works of the Law, but by hearing of faith.

(PPT) His sense of urgency over this issue of works seems to have stemmed from the long-standing traditions held by the Jews. The promise God made to Abraham occurred four hundred and thirty years before the Law was given to the children of Israel (Galatians 3:17). With that fact in mind, we must understand how relevant this matter of Abraham's faith is to the New Covenant. The only action taken by Abraham was based on the direction he received from God. Genesis 22 tells us Abraham was told to go and offer his son as a sacrifice to the Lord. What anguish this must have caused Abraham. According to Scripture, traveling to the region of Moriah was a three-day journey. When Abraham informed his son, Isaac, that he (Isaac) was to be the sacrifice, Isaac simply complied. This was a testimony to how devoted Abraham was to serving God. His son did not argue with him; Isaac simply submitted to the will of his father.

James 2 offers great insight into the connection between faith and works. This teaching by James does not contradict what Paul wrote to the Galatians concerning the truth that works cannot save us. However, it does demonstrate that our faith should be visible in our works. Our faith has no substance if no actions demonstrate our faith.

The expression "actions speak louder than words" fits perfectly with the idea that our faith becomes expressed by our works. James stated,

Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar? Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect? And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness: and he was called the Friend of God. Ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only. (James 2:21–24, KJV) (PPT)

We do not follow rules or complete a checklist and expect redemption. Our faith is visible by our actions as we follow the leading of God.

Paul declared, "The just shall live by faith" (PPT) (Galatians 3:11; Romans 1:16–17, KJV). (See also Habakkuk 2:4.) Several verses in Scripture reference the phrase "the just shall live by faith" or a variation of that phrase in declaring how believers must live. Faith is perplexing to the human mind as it can often go against our need for physical evidence, yet Scripture admonishes us to live by faith. *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* states *faith* is "belief and trust in and loyalty to God." Fortunately, we have a better definition in Hebrews 11:1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (KJV). When we come to Jesus, faith is born within us. While we may not see Him visibly, certainly we experience His presence with the infilling of the Holy Spirit, thus fulfilling "the evidence of things not seen." Paul wrote, "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17, KJV).

Jesus stated, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (PPT) (John 14:6, KJV). Throughout history many individuals have come and gone, having proclaimed they knew the way. Muhammed, Buddha, the Dali Lama, and others have all declared they had found the way. But only Jesus was able to boldly state this truth, "I am the way." This was not the egotistical proclamation of a self-exalted man, but the emphatic declaration of who Jesus was: God manifest in flesh.

In Exodus 3:13, Moses asked God who he should say sent him to the Israelites. God answered him in verse 14, "I AM THAT I AM: and he said, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you" (KJV). Jesus was God manifest in the flesh. I AM had come in person, which is why He truthfully declared, "I am the way." Numerous theologians have claimed Jesus was merely stating He knew the way; however, Jesus was more than a prophet or teacher. He was God Almighty.

- **Some theologians say Jesus meant He "knew" the way. What is the relevance of Jesus saying, "I AM," as opposed to "I know"?**

We must heed the warning Paul sounded and not stray from the true gospel message. (PPT) We can find many variations on what salvation is within contemporary Christianity. Since the fall of humanity in the Garden, people have desired to improve on what God ordained. The Bible is a great gift from God; it declares the gospel and has been recorded for all to read and hear. Yet often humanity still tries to water down or place conditions on the gospel instead of simply declaring its truth. We must be vigilant not to stray from the gospel; we are charged to maintain the gospel as described in God's Word.

Paul warned that if anyone—even an angel—preached any other gospel, they were to be accursed (PPT) (Galatians 1:8–9). North American society has become progressively more resistant toward Christians. The opposition that can surface with even a mere mention of the name of Jesus can quickly become polarizing for the individual declaring the gospel.

Technology gives us access to information within nanoseconds, unlike any time in the history of the world. Yet humanity has managed to pervert this useful tool as true information sits right alongside corrupted versions of the truth. The result has produced skepticism within many and has fueled arguments against the validity of the Bible. Paul declared a curse upon those who would distort the gospel.

- **How is Paul's warning to the Galatians about a different gospel relevant today?**

Paul directed Timothy to remain in Ephesus and shepherd believers away from false teachings (PPT) (I Timothy 1:3–4). The call to be a pastor is considered a high and holy calling. This is due to the incredible responsibility placed upon a pastor in caring for the souls God has brought into the pastor's congregation. Many aspects of pastoring are not visible in church services. We see our pastor preaching, teaching, and praying, yet numerous other duties go unseen or are seen by only a few. Not only are biblical requirements placed upon those who hold the office of pastor, but the demands felt by the responsibilities for the care of the flock a pastor oversees can be overwhelming. Pastors must stay current in terms of alternative gospels the world is offering in order to help preserve and hold believers accountable to the one true gospel.

- **Why is it critically important to have a shepherd in your life?**

Just like the human body, the body of Christ is composed of different parts that must work together (PPT) (Ephesians 4:11–16). We have all been created with different abilities and talents. Even our personalities differ in numerous ways. This mixture allows the church—the body of Christ—to function like a healthy human body. The human body has many visible components—the arms, legs, eyes, and mouth. Each one serves a different purpose, yet all must function in a healthy manner in order to make the whole body complete. Internal parts also are vital to the body, though they may not be visible. The church is the same. While numerous ministries are visible, even more vital ministries go unseen. All must function properly in order for the body of Christ to be complete. Not everyone can do every function within the body; therefore, all of us are called to a different purpose.

FINISH

Aesop was a Greek storyteller who lived six hundred years before Christ. He is credited for having written many fables, often used as moral analogies. In one story titled *The Belly and the Members*, Aesop used various parts of the body and their assumption about the belly to illustrate human behavior. He wrote,

MANUSCRIPT

One fine day it occurred to the Members of the Body that they were doing all the work and the Belly was having all the food. So they held a meeting, and after a long discussion, decided to strike work till the Belly consented to take its proper share of the work. So for a day or two, the Hands refused to take the food, the Mouth refused to receive it, and the Teeth had no work to do. But after a day or two the Members began to find that they themselves were not in a very active condition: the Hands could hardly move, and the Mouth was all parched and dry, while the Legs were unable to support the rest. So thus, they found that even the Belly in its dull quiet way was doing necessary work for the Body, and that all must work together, or the Body will go to pieces.

We can see how the different parts of the body play different functions, yet all are relevant to the good health and functionality of the body. So too is the body of Christ. We must not become blinded by our own prejudices or petty desires for position, thus causing disruption in the body. As the story clearly illustrated, the other parts became weak and could no longer function because there was no food in the belly. The belly processed the food to nourish the other members. Some people see their pastor in a way that causes them to go on strike, usually because of something their pastor says. Yet their pastor is only trying to provide spiritual and biblical nourishment for their souls in order to keep the body of Christ functioning. God established the church, and every member is important.