

Hab. 2:4 The Righteous Will Live by Faith (part 3)

Today, I would like to continue this topic of how we are saved by stating that it is by “faith alone” we are saved. As God told Habakkuk, the “righteous will LIVE (have life, be saved) by faith.” The implication and the truth taught more clearly in the NT is that we are saved NOT BY WORKS, but by FAITH, which is the opposite of works. And it isn’t that faith is “alone,” because good works always follow faith. But, it means our salvation is not based upon our works. And this is Paul’s emphasis in both Rom. 3 and Gal. 3. With this in mind, I have 1 truth with some applications to follow.

1. We are justified by faith alone. Last week we spoke about the fact that those who have “faith” are “justified” before God. In other words, on our own, we are not righteous. Legally, as sinners we stand as “guilty” in the courtroom of God the Judge. **“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”** (Rom. 3:23). But, the good news is that the righteousness of God comes to us (is “imputed” to us) because of the person and work of Christ. On the cross, though He did not sin, in his death, God punished Christ in our place. He declared Him GUILTY and those who trust in him are NOT GUILTY. Our unrighteousness is laid upon Him and his righteousness is given to us. And based upon the work of another (Christ), those who trust in Him have a righteous standing before God. This is the doctrine of justification.

In the NT the Apostle Paul shows how our justification before God finds its fulfillment in the Gospel of Christ. But, then he links this “justification,” this “righteousness” with FAITH. Turn with me to Rom. 1:16-17: **“For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘the righteous shall live by faith.’**” And after these verses, Paul then goes on for the next 11 chapters to unpack the meaning of the good news of this Gospel. And a big theme of his explanation is FAITH. Namely, what does it mean to be justified by “faith.” And I think we can sum this truth up by saying that we are not saved by works; we are not justified before God because of our works; instead, we are saved through the means of faith alone. This is *Sola Fide*, one of the great 5 pillars of the Protestant Reformation.

Let me give some examples of what this looks like. The most obvious example from the NT is Israel, particularly the religious leaders and Pharisees of Jesus’ day. They believed they could be saved because they keep the Law of Moses. And in keeping these laws, they are justified before God. This is exactly what the Apostle Paul was thinking before he encountered the Lord Jesus on the Road to Damascus. And the Book of Romans is Paul’s defense of justification by faith alone.

Also consider the RC Church. It teaches that a person is justified by works. This begins with baptism and then moves to the attendance of mass and then continued confession to a priest and other good works. And in doing these works God helps the person along that he/she is “justified” more and more through this life and eventually, these good works (alongside of grace), will lead to salvation, heaven, and eternal life. I think of Martin Luther. As hard as he worked to be a good monk, he continued to go to the priest, going often, yet still thinking he had left something out, or feeling like his motive was wrong. That’s when the priest told him to stop confessing such petty sins. *“Why don’t you do something worth confessing? Kill your mother or father! Commit*

adultery! Stop coming in here with such flummery and fake sins!” If this is our understanding of how a person is made right before God, we will always be confessing, always be working, always trying to “help God help us.”

Another example is the religion of Islam. We have some things in common. Both Christianity and Islam believe God is holy and righteous. And we both believe that men are sinners. And both believe we must have faith in God. But, this is where we depart from one another. Muslims believe in the 5 pillars of Islam: 1) Confess there is one God and his prophet Muhammed; 2) Prayer (5 times per day towards Mecca, with specific washings); 3) Almsgiving (charity); 4) Fasting; and 5) Pilgrimage (to Mecca, or other approved site). And if a person does these things, he/she is a good Muslim. But more importantly, if these works are done, a person will (though there is no assurance) be saved. This is their “doctrine of justification.” This is the doctrine that separates every religion from Christianity. This is what the world believes. They are always thinking, “*Am I good enough?*” “*Will my good works outweigh my bad works?*” And to understand this truth rightly as the Bible teaches is to possess the key to life. To understand that we are justified, or have a right standing with God, not having our sins count against us, is the key to unlock all the blessings of God.

Now, turn with me to Rom. 4. Here, Paul speaks about the faith of Abraham. He says that Abraham’s “righteous standing” before God is not based upon his works, but instead, Paul says that Abraham was saved through the means of faith. Think back to God’s promise to Abraham. God said, “*I will bless you. I will give you a land. I will give you many offspring.*” And we know the story. Abraham becomes an old man with an old wife and they still have no children of their own. And though Abraham tries to help God with his promise, the Bible tells us that He still believes God will do what He has promised. In Gen. 15 God comes to Abraham and says, “*Trust me. I will fulfill my promise.*” And then Abraham says: “**O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?**” And Abram said, “**Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.**” And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: “**This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir.**” And he brought him outside and said, “**Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.**” Then he said to him, “**So shall your offspring be.**” And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness” (Gen. 15:2-6).

Now look at Rom. 4:1 “**What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?**” In other words, did he “works” save him? Or was it faith in God’s promise? Look at v. 2: “**For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.** 3 **For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God . . .**” THIS is FAITH. And then we read: “**and it was counted to him as righteousness.**” Now, skip down to v. 13: “**For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.**” Now look at v. 16: “**That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring . . .**” Now move down to v. 18: “**In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations . . .**” And then in 19: “**He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.** 20 No

unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness . . .” And then v. 23 Paul considers our faith and its fulfillment in Christ. V. 23: **“But the words ‘it was counted to him’ were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”** Brothers and sisters, we are not saved by our works, but we are saved as we look unto Christ by faith.

Let me end with 7 implications/applications.

1. Faith itself is not a work. We contribute NOTHING to our salvation. This is the beauty of faith. It is not a work. It is not a work but, a gift. And faith receives what God gives. And God gives Christ. All God’s promises to the OT saints and to Habakkuk are fulfilled in Christ. Eph. 2:8-9 **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”**

2. Faith may appear dead in some, but it will ultimately triumph. Though faith is weak, it will continue until the end. Calvin likens faith to a shield in battle. Though it is struck many times and may be damaged and become weak, it will not ultimately be destroyed. This is why I love the son “He will hold me fast.” What God gives He will not take away, but fulfill his promise.

3. By faith a person is “justified, but at the same time a sinner.” Luther, in his commentary on Galatians says this: *“Sin remains in us, and God hates them very much. Because of them it is necessary for us to have the imputation of righteousness, which comes to us on account of Christ, who is given to us and grasped by our faith.”* Sin remains in this life. But, by faith, we are saved through Christ. (Such is this life!) The life of faith is not simple and easy; it is a fight.

4. If salvation is by faith alone, then we must find assurance in the finished work of Christ. If it is not our works we rely on, but the work of Christ, we can have assurance. As Christ sits in heaven, having made purification for our sins, our assurance is as settled as who he is and what he has done. Listen to the words of assurance from Martin Luther concerning salvation by faith, not works. *“At last, by the mercy of God, meditating day and night, I gave heed to the context of the words, namely, ‘For in [the gospel] the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ There I began to understand that the righteousness of God is that by which the righteous lives by a gift of God, namely by faith. And this is the meaning: the righteousness of God is revealed by the gospel, namely the passive righteousness with which the merciful God justifies us by faith, as it is written, ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ Here I felt that I was altogether born again and had entered paradise itself through open gates. . . . And I extolled my sweetest words with a love as great as the hatred with which I had before hated the words ‘righteousness of God.’ Thus that place in Paul was for me the very gate to paradise.”*

5. Faith comes through hearing the word. John 20:31: **“But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”** And, Rom. 10:17: **“So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word**

of Christ.” How did we believe? We believed when the word of Christ came to us and our minds said, “*Yes, that is true. Yes, this is good. Yes, this is from God.*” And then our heart said, “*Yes, that’s my desire. That’s what I want.*” And I would also say that we don’t merely BEGIN with the Word, but continue with the Word. If you find yourself over time moving away from the reading and desire for the words of Scripture, beware.

6. If we are saved by faith alone, then God gets all the glory. There is absolutely NO boasting for the one who has faith. If faith is a gift and we cannot work to get it, then the glory is not ours.

7. What is the evidence of faith? 2 Comments to finish: i. Faith looks to Christ and Christ alone for our salvation. This means all our affections, loves, motives, desires are focused on the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the ONE we love. He is the ONE we pursue. He is the ONE we trust. He is the ONE we tell others about. He is the ONE we teach our kids to trust. He is the ONE we preach! This is the design of faith, to be united to Christ, and this is by the Spirit, until our faith becomes sight. ii. Those with faith, those who look unto Christ, live very differently than the world. Think of Habakkuk first. How did he live knowing that the Babylonians were coming? How do we live in spite of what the world throws at us (by God’s providence I must add). Look with me to Heb. 11 as we consider what faith looks like.