

THE JUST SHALL LIVE BY FAITH

“For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.”

- Romans 1:17 (KJV)

The apostle Paul writes this very profound statement in his letter to the Romans. Actually, he first used the phrase, *“the just shall live by faith,”* in his letter to the Galatians. (Galatians 3:11) We read it also in Hebrews 10:38 whose author may or may not have been Paul. We must take note, that as we have seen, the phrase, *“the just shall live by faith”* is used multiple times but in different letters. This infers that this “phrase” was very important to the New Testament writers and to New Testament doctrine. That being the case, it is most interesting to note that this phrase *“the just shall live by faith”* actually is first found within the Jewish scriptures.

Paul, in Romans and Galatians, as well as the writer of Hebrews, is quoting from Habakkuk 2:4 – *“Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: **but the just shall live by his faith.**”* Therefore, to better grasp the purpose of using this phrase in these New Testament letters we must first understand the use of this phrase by Habakkuk. To do so, we must first place it within its context within the entirety of Habakkuk’s prophetic word to the Jewish people of his day.

Habakkuk begins with a lament concerning the iniquity of God’s people. (Habakkuk 1:1-4) Habakkuk then declares that God will bring forth some harsh correction to His people because of their iniquity. He will do so by using the Chaldeans as His instruments of correction. (Habakkuk 1:5-11) Habakkuk laments that the Chaldeans are ruthless and that the punishment would be too great for the people. (Habakkuk 1:12-17) God responds to Habakkuk’s lament by telling him that he must wait and trust in God’s “appointed time” for His deliverance (“the vision”) of His people. (Habakkuk 2:1-5)

In its context in Habakkuk, we see that the Lord is speaking to His people concerning things that are to come – most of which may not be very pleasant. However, the prophet continues and exhorts the people to be watchful, wait and trust in God’s “appointed time” for His ultimate plan of divine protection and deliverance from their enemies. Habakkuk states that the “vision,” God’s plan, even though it may “tarry,” will come to pass at the “appointed time.”

In our verse in Habakkuk, the prophet first refers to the person who lifts himself up instead of having confidence and trust in the Lord God. This person is NOT upright. That person does not have a right relationship with God nor correct concept of God because he is depending upon himself and not God.

Therefore, we can say that the opposite is then true. A person who would be considered “upright” before the Lord would be one who has a true conviction within their heart that God is who He says He is and that His plan, the “vision,” will come to pass at the His “appointed time.” It is that individual, who in Habakkuk’s thinking at that time, would be considered “upright.” It is that individual who *“shall live by faith.”*

Paul draws on this as He opens his letter to the Romans with this quotation from Habakkuk. The reason that Paul quotes Habakkuk is because his letter is all about God’s grand plan of deliverance and salvation, first revealed in the Jewish scriptures, and then brought forth by and through Jesus. God’s plan of salvation is one that would open the door of salvation to everyone – to the Jew first and then to the Gentiles.

Paul’s uses this prophetic word spoken by Habakkuk as an introductory premise for his letter to the Roman believers. He uses his scriptures (the Jewish scriptures) to confirm and validate the doctrine of salvation through Jesus that he will be teaching in this letter. The premise *“the just shall live by faith”* refers to the need to trust and rely on God’s ultimate plan of salvation – now revealed and to be experienced through Jesus. This is God’s plan that brings eternal salvation and freedom from the bondage of sin and death to all who believe. This is what would make a person, as in Habakkuk’s words, “upright” before God.

If we take Romans 1:17, Galatians 3:11 and Hebrew 10:38 and place them within the context of where they were written within each letter, we find that the writer of each of the letters is speaking about “saving faith.” In Habakkuk, the prophet was writing that at “the appointed time” (Habakkuk 2:3) God will bring His people out of their bondage and deliver/save them. In the natural realm, to the Hebrews at the time of Habakkuk’s prophetic word and to the Jewish people today, this meant freedom from their surrounding enemy nations and peoples and the restoration of the land of Israel to the Jewish people.

However, in the spiritual sense, for those who would have “ears to hear” God was declaring that “the appointed time” points to and would come for their spiritual freedom from the bondage of their sin. Sin was the real enemy. Paul by using and quoting Habakkuk was declaring that the time is NOW and spiritual salvation comes through God’s plan - His plan of salvation through Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world.

The way we have used these scriptures and the way they have been brought forth concerning “faith” by today’s church is not necessarily incorrect. However, these days, the way we have made “what faith is” is actually the secondary aspect and not the primary thing that God was and is telling His people and anyone else that would hear. God’s **primary concern** when it comes to “faith” is saving faith – believing that the Father wants to have a relationship with everyone and it is now available through what Jesus did on the cross. The familiar discourse by Paul concerning faith found in Romans 10:9-17 is actually about “saving faith” and not necessarily “mountain moving faith.”

Yes, the same principles may apply to “mountain moving faith” but the **primary purpose** of the God given concept of “faith” is for salvation and the restoration of relationship between God and the individual. Will people simply trust and be confident in God’s plan of salvation for them? Will they simply trust in His never ending love, grace and mercy? Will they cease from trusting in themselves as the source of salvation and true freedom from the bondage of their sin?

Unfortunately, whether, we realize it or not, we have made faith into a “works” which is really where, I believe, some very serious “confusion” and misconceptions come into being concerning what “*the just shall live by faith*” original’s intent was. Many of us struggle with what the concept of faith “has become” rather than the concept of faith that was originally brought forth by the Apostles. This is where I believe many of us have struggled with guilt and condemnation that may rise up when it comes to the concept of “faith.”

Many of us find ourselves in constant turmoil within concerning such things as, “Do we have enough faith for the things we want to see happen? “Am I praying right? Am I really, really, really believing or is there any hint of doubt? Am I using the correct scriptures or did I use enough scriptures? Did I forget one? Did I pray long enough and hard enough?” And it goes on and on. When it turns out the way we wanted the credit goes to us rather than God because “I” did everything right and “I” made this happen. God becomes just a bystander. Hmmm When it doesn’t turn out the way we thought it should – guilt, condemnation and even thoughts of not really being saved come thundering in. Hmmm.....

Do you see the problems in both of the above scenarios? They both leave God out of the equation and place our self at the center of everything. Therein lies the problem – it becomes all about us and not about God. We have been taught that we are the ones who now make things happen. We are taught that if we do everything correct and speak the “correct” scriptures and “truly believe and have not even a hint of doubt” that God is somehow obligated to do “whatever we desire” – no matter what His will may be for that situation. This way of thinking is a little misguided and is actually making the individual their own god in their life in place of the true God.

Let's face it – the way our modern day concept of faith has become, with all its “rules and steps,” we could never get it all right. This brings, and unfortunately has brought us, back into the bondage of what I call “the law” of faith. We are no longer under the bondage of the Law but rather we have now become in bondage to all the “rules and “steps” we have made concerning faith. Our faith has become a “law of works.” We are taught that if we follow all the rules and steps, “we will have whatever we desire.”

Many times when things do not turn out the way we think they were supposed to or the way we wanted to happen, the enemy uses that disappointment to either cause us to get angry with and even question God's ways. It may lead us into mistrusting God. It may even cause some to “walk away” from God. I have seen this happen, unfortunately, to many people. This was the lie that the enemy sowed into Adam and Eve.

The problem in the Garden was not that Adam and Eve disobeyed. The real problem was that they trusted in what the enemy had said concerning their relationship with God rather than trusting and having confidence in what God had said about their relationship with Him. They became shaky in their trust of God thereby causing them to become shaky in their faith in God's relationship with them. The enemy brought a tactic that caused them to entertain the thought that God could not be trusted.

In essence that is how they “gave away” their righteousness and justification. They rejected the simple truth that God was their source and their salvation. The enemy “sowed” a counterfeit plan, one that was contrary to God's plan for them. He “sowed” the thought that God was holding back and could not be trusted. Ultimately, the enemy was telling them that God was a liar. They ended up believing the lie, they believed in the counterfeit plan, causing them to not trust God, lean on their own understanding and... you know the rest of the story.

We are all very familiar with Isaiah 55:8 and 9 which tells us, *“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”* We must never forget this when it comes to trusting God and walking in faith. The scriptures just prior to and after these verses, however, are invaluable to truly understanding those found in verses 8 and 9.

Isaiah 55:6 and 7 tell us, *“Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: ⁷ Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.”* The prophet is calling God's people to a time of truly seeking after the Lord and **His will**. Isaiah is exhorting God's people to turn from their own ways of thinking and understanding which has been tainted by unrighteousness and sin. God's people are to rest on His unfailing mercy and righteousness in all things and to not lean on their own understanding of how they may think things should turn out and be.

If we look further, we see the prophet Isaiah really begins this whole thought in the first five verses of chapter 55. In verses 1-5, Isaiah is speaking of and pointing to the time that was to come (the appointed time) when Messiah would come. In these scriptures, Isaiah is calling the people to trust in or, we can say, “live by faith” in their God because of His promise to send them a Messiah, a Savior. Notice, the emphasis is upon “saving faith.” He is encouraging the people to totally deposit their trust in God's salvation. They are to trust in the fact that it is God who will bring this to pass. It will not happen because of them or what they do. It is totally God because it is totally His plan for them. They simply needed to trust their God.

This whole account in Isaiah is primarily concerned with God's sovereign plan of salvation that He had instituted from before the foundations of the earth were even laid. This section of Isaiah is primarily about “saving faith.” Yes, the principles may apply elsewhere but, again, the Father's primary concern is for the restoration of relationship back to Him.

The most important aspect of this whole section in Isaiah 55 is found in verse 11, “So shall **my word** be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it **shall accomplish** that **which I please**, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto **I sent it.**” God declares very clearly that His Word will accomplish what He pleases and sets it forth to accomplish. Here, again, is where another problem arises.

Many times, we are taught, that the Word of God, when “used correctly” in any situation will accomplish what **we want it to accomplish**. This is contrary to what God, Himself, is declaring in His own Word. He is very clearly stating that His Word will accomplish what **He wants it to accomplish**. He does not say anything about it accomplishing what we want. You see, it is all about Him and His purposes and ways that are much, much higher and greater than anything of our own understanding.

Yes, we are to declare His Word. But we are to declare it without any of our own tainted and biased preconceived ideas. We are to declare it and believe that it will accomplish what God desires. It is all about His plans. It is all about His Kingdom. It is all about God’s plan for the Second Coming of Jesus. It is all about looking towards eternity and not for this moment in time. If we have this understanding then we can properly grasp within its true context what Romans 8:28 tells us, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called **according to His purpose.***” This is the epitome of “the just living by faith.”

The scriptures in which we find the phrase “*the just **shall live by faith,***” are actually referring to “saving faith.” This “saving faith” is a confidence that our relationship with the Father will never end **IF** the individual continues to be confident and steadfast in the fact that it is only in and through Jesus that we can have this relationship. This relationship is through nothing that we did or ever can do. It is only through Jesus.

The word “shall” in this phrase is actually in the “future tense.” It is in the future tense because it is meant to be a continuing faith in the plan of salvation established by the Father. Not just a onetime acknowledgement in the now. Rather, it is a never ending forever continual “saving faith” and trust in Jesus to be experienced every moment of our life here on this earth and into eternity with the Father.

Moment by next moment and in every moment that follows we are to have this confidence in our relationship with God simply because we are only justified through the blood of Jesus. The enemy’s task is to shake that confidence. Many times he uses faulty understandings of this simple concept of faith. He causes us to “think too much” thereby making it more and more difficult. He causes us to misplace our trust of God and place our trust somewhere else. Many times, whether we realize it or not, we end up placing our trust in ourselves and in what we think is correct.

By believing in God’s plan of salvation through Jesus we are brought back into relationship with the Father. As mentioned, this is “saving faith.” We are “saved” from an eternal separation from God, the Father, Jesus and the Holy Spirit. This is “eternal death.” “Saving faith” opens the door for the believer to now walk in “right standing” (righteousness) before and with their God. Righteousness is simply the ability to now have a relationship and be able to communicate with God, the Father. Justification through the blood of Jesus gives us the “spiritual right” as His sons and daughters (new creations) to have that relationship and communion with Him.

We have heard it said that “God no longer sees our old nature.” The fact is that **God is God**. It is an oversimplification to say that God doesn’t “see” our “old nature.” God sees and knows everything. It is not that God doesn’t “see our old nature” anymore but rather the truth is that the “old person” with that sinful nature is no longer in existence. Through Jesus and the regenerative work of the Holy Spirit, our spirit is “brought to life” or we can say “born again.” Through the work of the Holy Spirit within, a new creation is made, a new species of being – a child of God. The “old” has passed away. (2Corinthians 5:17)

Prior to accepting and believing in all that Jesus did, our relationship with God was “dead.” This simply means that we had no relationship with God. God is life and in Him through Jesus there is life and life more abundantly. We were all “dead” to Him because of sin and nothing could change that. It is only by the blood of Jesus as the final sacrifice who washed away the sin of the world that allows the Holy Spirit to make us into a totally new creation. This then allows us to be brought back in to a relationship with the Father. We are now “alive” to the Father through the “saving faith” we have in Christ. (Romans 6:11)

This takes us to another scripture, Romans 12:3, *“For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man **the measure of faith.**”* Taking this scripture within its context, Paul is referring to “saving faith” that leads to salvation. No one is to think more highly of them selves because this salvation comes to anyone who believes. “Saving faith” makes everyone equal because it has nothing to do with anything anyone has done other than Jesus.

As we continue on in Romans 12, we read that Paul goes into “spiritual gifts.” Therefore, he is saying that there is a correlation between this “saving faith” and the “gifts” given to and for the Body of Christ. He is teaching that every individual who now has been changed into that new species of being through “saving faith” will be an asset to the Body of Christ in the specific way that God has “ordained” or “appointed” them to be.

The “measure of faith” is the individual’s “saving faith” that has brought them into the Body of Christ. Now, as a part of the Body, God can and will use each of us in the specific way that God had created each of us to be used. This is because of that “saving faith” that has now brought us into and made us to be members of the Body of Christ. Our purpose in being a member of the Body of Christ is to build up, edify, comfort, encourage, exhort, etc all those fellow members of the Body. We can only do this through the “saving faith” we have in the atoning Blood and sacrifice of Jesus.

“Saving faith” is a life-changing conviction within the heart that is totally “sold out” to God and His ways. “Saving faith” continually understands and trusts in the fact that God is a sovereign God and that His ways are not our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts. He is already in our tomorrows. Isaiah 46:10 reveals this truth as it states, *“Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and **I will do all my pleasure...**”*

Most importantly, as we stated previously, **“GOD’S WORD WILL ACCOMPLISH WHAT HE WANTS IT TO ACCOMPLISH.”** We trust in that truth no matter what or how things turn out to be. As we speak or pray His Word, He will **always** hear His Word, as well as our heart and He will **always** answer. His answer will always have His sovereign plan in mind for both, our best interest and most importantly in the bringing forth of His Kingdom. As His people, we are justified in His sight. If that is the truth, and it is, then we as *“the just shall live by faith.”*