

Intro. This morning I would like to share five thoughts with you to prepare us for celebrating with Zach, Michael, Lindsey, Heather and Patrick in their baptisms. It is absolutely imperative that we understand as clearly as possible what is happening and what is not happening in this meeting today.

The Bible teaches that baptism is a step of obedience by the person who has become right with God through faith in Jesus Christ. This public obedience communicates in ceremony and picture what has happened in reality to a person who has been made right with God. Galatians 2:15-21 (p.1152) is a section of the Bible that helps us understand what happens to the person who is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ.

Read Galatians 2:15-21

Two assumptions, both true and taught clearly in the Bible, that shape our thinking are one, God is righteous, we are not. Two, something is wrong between us and God. Our wrong actions and thoughts not only separate us from God but also draw his just judgment. These assumptions lead us to the question we consider with these five thoughts from this Bible passage . . . how can a person be made right with God? We are preparing to hear the stories of how 5 people became right with God and then see the answer pictured in baptism. Please consider these five thoughts:

1. Two ways of becoming right with God are being debated, one is right; one is wrong. 15-16

Option A Become right with God by own good works. ‘observing the law’

Note 3 components to this approach . . .

- Believe in God, Jesus and the Bible.
- Commitment to obey the laws and commands.
- Sincere practice of the ceremonial, religious aspects.

Option B Become right with God by faith in Christ. ‘faith in Jesus Christ’

Note 3 components to this approach . . .

- Jesus, God’s Son, obeyed the laws perfectly.
- Jesus died for our sins/lawbreaking and in our place.
- Only requirement is repentant faith in Jesus Christ.

2. 'Faith in Christ' is the only way for a person to be made right with God. 15-16

Note the testimony or personal defense by Peter and Paul, leading apostles of the church.

- They say 'we know' that no person is made right with God by their own works.
- They confirm with their own experience – they have been made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ.
- They confirm by Holy Scripture that it is impossible to be made right with God by observing the law.

3. Does being made right with God by 'faith only' promote a life of doing as you please? 17

This is both a universal and understandable response to 'faith only' righteousness. It is dangerous in that it appears to promote sin and weaken moral responsibility. The argument has 2 parts:

- Since . . . my works of righteousness are of no value and all I have to do is believe . . .
- Then . . . what keeps me from living as I please and sinning irresponsibly?

4. Being made right with God by faith unites a person with Christ making them a new person. 18-20

Note this new life is described in the following terms . . .

- New life is pictured as the old you dying and having a new kind of life. 19-20
- New life means both standing before God and individual life are changed. 19
- New life comes from personal union with Jesus Christ. 20
- New life is lived by principle of faith in Jesus Christ. 20
- New life is described as personal response to love and sacrifice of Jesus. 20

5. Be careful to not ignore or reject God's love by holding to works righteousness. 21

Believing that your good works will make you right with God is dangerous for two reasons:

- You set aside the grace of God in its many expressions. 21
- You strip the core significance from the suffering and death of Christ. 21

Conclusion

Listen carefully to these stories of how God has made people new by faith in Jesus Christ.

Watch carefully as we celebrate the significance of being united with Jesus in his death, burial and resurrection.

Celebrate carefully as we are reminded of each person's commitment to Christ to live the new life by faith in Christ and in response to his love and sacrifice.

Respond carefully as we give you opportunity to turn from your works and self righteousness to simple trust in Jesus Christ alone for your right standing with God. You can become a new person today.