

Bible Study # 16

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“Faith Alone” Controversy

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- People often read *Galatians* and *Romans* out of its historical context resulting in confusion and misunderstandings
- As discussed last week, much of what Luther believed was part of the flower of the Middle Ages that had developed in the centuries before him
- Luther was familiar with the Augustinian – Pelagius debates, and therefore, looked at what one believed vs what one did as an either or proposition

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- He was influenced by the heretical views of Wycliffe, Hus, and Ockham and the Franciscan- Dominican theological debates
- Thus, he read Galatians and Romans through that prism of that era
- Paul, who lived centuries before, was debating whether one could be saved through **faith in Jesus Christ as preached in the Gospel** or did one **also need to practice the Torah**
- Paul's **conclusion** was that **faith in Jesus Christ** was all that was necessary and that by adding the Law one was placing their faith in Moses rather than Jesus

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- Luther understood:
 - “**Works of the law**” as the works one does in which the self-righteous believe that by doing them, they are justified and so are righteous on account of the works – (**Pelagianism**)
 - That while doing good, one does not seek after righteousness but merely boasts that they have already attained righteousness through their works
- In his commentary on **Rom 3:28** Luther argued that one was being saved through what one believed versus what one did (a complete misreading of Paul)

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- Then he failed to comment on **Rom 3:29** in his commentary *“since God is one; and he will justify the circumcised on the grounds of their faith and the un-circumcised through their faith.”*
- By this time he had already developed his doctrine on “faith alone” and thus he was commenting on the scriptures through that lens
- Luther also took issue with the **Book of James** which he saw as “straw”

Martin Luther (1483-1546)

- Another area of dispute between Protestants and Catholics is over the “once saved always saved” theory
 - Many Protestants believe that once a person is Baptized they are guaranteed entrance into paradise
 - Luther believed that once one was saved (truly believed that Jesus had saved him), he could not lose his salvation
 - The early Church councils stated that anyone who believed that they are **assured of their salvation** is to be **anathematized**

What was St James Saying?

- St James says that we are **justified by works as well as by faith**
- He is using the word **justification** in a **slightly different manner** than St Paul
 - **Paul** says that justification means to change from being “bad” in God’s sight (a state of sin) to being “good” (state of grace)
 - **James**, using justification means **being kept**, “kept good” (in the state of grace and becoming even better in God’s sight
 - It could mean in everyday language “being made healthy”

What was St James Saying? (Cont)

- James is teaching that having been **initially justified by faith**, we **must persevere in good works** as well as in faith, in order to grow or increase in “justice” (holiness or righteousness)
- Abraham:
 - Was first justified by faith when he came to believe God’s call and promise
 - Afterwards he was justified still further by the work – an obedient act – of being prepared to sacrifice his son Isaac at God’s command

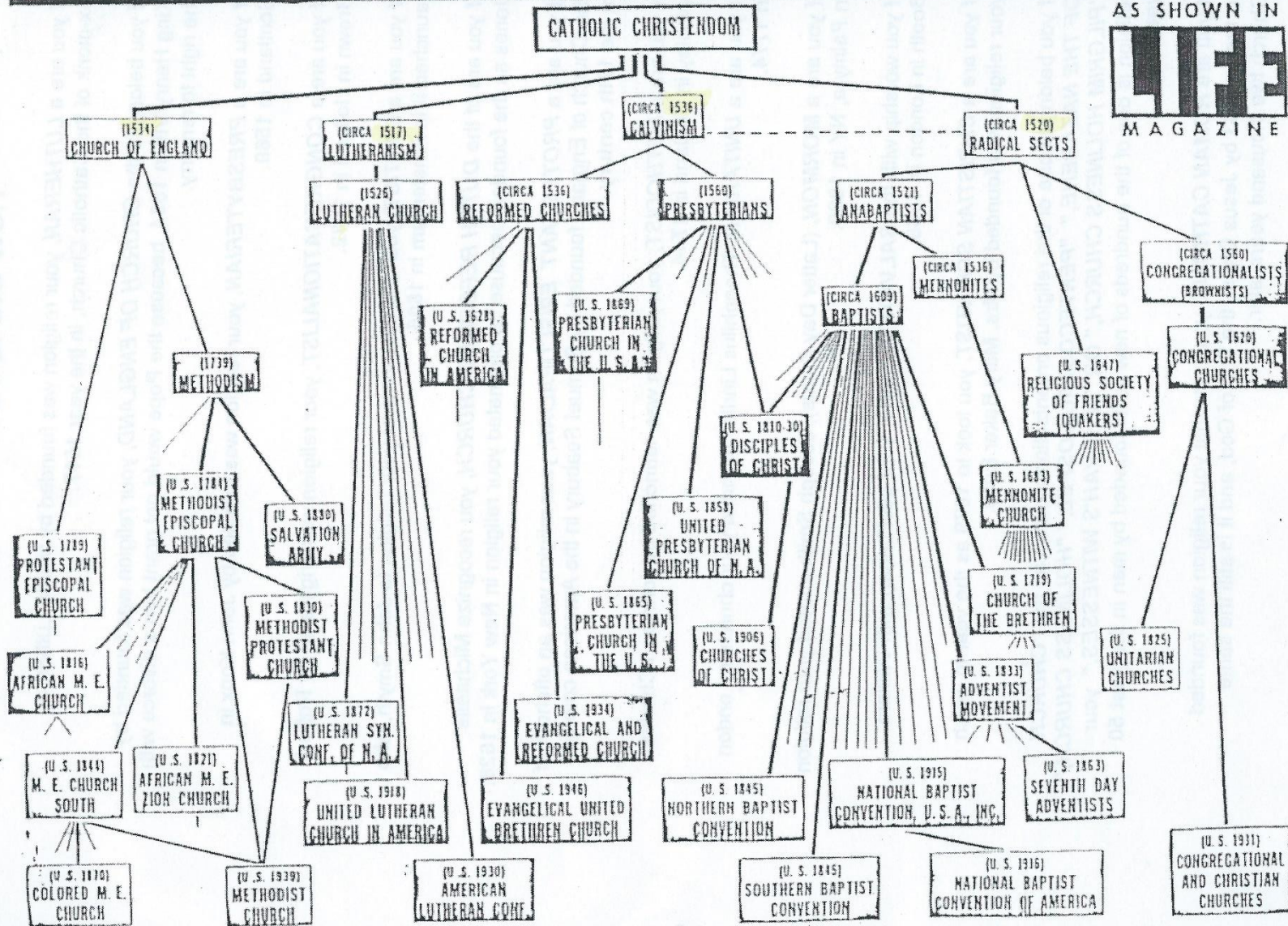
What Was St James Saying? (Cont)

- There are many biblical passages that make it clear that after we are freely forgiven and justified by faith and grace, one must persevere in good works if we are to retain that grace and attain final salvation
- How does the Catholic deal with such controversies?
? *
- The Holy Office
- Councils
- What has happened to the Protestant world without such organizations?

ORIGINS AND DIVISIONS OF PROTESTANTISM

AS SHOWN IN

LIFE
MAGAZINE



Romans 4

Romans 4

- **Romans 4:1- 12** *“What then shall we say about Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?” For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God....**our** father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”*
 - Notice that Paul is talking to the Jews when he says **our forefather**
 - They (**the Jews**) must have wondered how Abraham, the father of Israel, could be so discounted
 - Paul first presented this argument in the letter to the Galatians (Ga 3:6-7) and adds more details to it here
 - The story of the **faith of Abraham** is presented in **Gn 15**

Romans 4 (Cont)

- But we find that God called Abraham (**Gn 12:1-3**) when he was **still an uncircumcised Gentile**
- In fact, God had an very un-kosher meal with him consisting of milk and calf (**Gn 18:6-8**)
- Thus, Abraham expressed his faith in God **before he was circumcised (Gn 17:24)** or practiced Kosher (which did not come until Moses receives the Law from God on Mt Sinai)
- And based on Abraham's faith, God promised him descendants as numerous as the stars of heaven (**Gn 15:4-6**)

Romans 4 (Cont)

- The story of **Abraham being justified by faith (Gn 15:6)** is what Paul is discussing with the Jews in the Church in Rome
- He proclaims that the Jews who trust in Jesus are like Abraham trusting in God in Genesis
- All baptized Christians will close their eyes trusting in the baptismal promises of Jesus and then arise in eternal salvation
- There is no need to add anything from the old covenant to the new covenant

Romans 4 (Cont)

- There is no need for a back up plan for salvation
- Faith in Jesus Christ is sufficient
- Remember how badly things were when the Jews, as a backup plan, turned from God the Golden calf?

Romans 4 (Cont)

- **Romans 4:13** *“The promise to Abraham and his descendants, that they should inherit the world, did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.”*
 - Again, as we discussed in Galatians, if you highlight the words “circumcision” and un-circumcision” with a pink highlighter, this entire section will be pink!
 - This is **all about “the works of the Law”** (circumcision and Kosher) **versus faith in Jesus**

Romans 4 (Cont)

- Unfortunately, most people do not see how central this idea of circumcision and all that flows from it are in this epistle
- The promise to Abraham did not come through the Law as it was given even before Abraham and his family were circumcised
- The discussion is also represented in **Genesis 22**

Romans 4 (Cont)

- **Romans 4:14 –17** *“If it the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.... In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist”*
 - Look at the beautiful language here
 - Not only will his descendants be many nations, but he (Abraham) will be the father of these nations
 - This is not **brought about** through circumcision but through **the faith of Abraham** *

Romans 4 (Cont)

- **Romans 4:18-25** *“In hope he believed against hope,... who put to death for our trespasses and raised for our justification”*
 - As a result, Abraham is the father of all believers, and his faith is the **“type” of Christian faith**
 - He, because of that grace and favor from God, is the prime example (in the Old Testament) of someone who has no reason to boast
 - For the Jews in the Church of Rome, Abraham, the forefather, was an ideal figure as they were his children according to the flesh

Romans 4 (Cont)

- It was because of him they received their special relationship with God as the chosen people
- With him alone God made his covenant
- And although he was considered “upright” before God, he had no right to boast of that status in the sight of God
- Paul demonstrated that even Abraham was not considered up righteous by obeying the Law but makes him the prime example of those who through faith are upright