

Continuing in Faith
 #5 in Series: Grace Works!
 Heb. 10:38

Richard Tow 5-7-16

“The just shall live by faith.”

That statement is found four times in Scripture. It is the revelation that fueled the Protestant Reformation. It is the basis of Martin Luther’s understanding of justification by faith. The impact of that verse on Western Christianity is hard to overstate. The sacramental, legalistic system of the Catholic Church was challenged when God opened Luther’s eyes to this fundamental truth. *“The just shall live by faith.”* Do you believe that statement? What does it mean for you and me?

Let’s begin by looking at the four passages where that statement is made.

Rom. 1:16-17 *“For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek. 17 For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’”*¹ Notice two things in that passage. (1) This kernel of truth is essential to *“the gospel of Christ.”* The context in which Paul quotes this statement is the gospel which is *“the power of God to salvation.”* The Greek word for salvation is *soteria*. Like the verb form *sozo*, it does not just mean born again.² It is talking about our whole experience with God. Being born again is the essential beginning; but, then there is a walk with God; there is a work of God in our daily lives; it all culminates in our glorification at the resurrection of the just.³

We are in a series called Grace Works! One thing that we have to understand is grace works *through faith*. Eph 2:8 *“For by grace you have been saved through faith....”* To every man is given a measure of faith.⁴ God gives us faith so that we can be saved. It is our choice to believe in Christ or not to believe in Christ. We have the freewill to exercise our faith in Christ or to exercise it in ourselves or in some false god. Faith in God is always a factor. Think about John 3:16 *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”* What is the one condition in that verse for not perishing, for having everlasting life? *“...whoever believes in Him.”*⁵ God so loved the world, that He provided salvation for *“whoever”* (anyone who would receive it); but, how is it

¹ All Scripture quotes are from the New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² *Soteria* is a broad word meaning “rescue or safety (physically or morally)”. NT:4991 (Biblesoft's New Exhaustive Strong's Numbers and Concordance with Expanded Greek-Hebrew Dictionary. Copyright (c) 1994, Biblesoft and International Bible Translators, Inc.)

³ Luther himself wrote, “The words evidently mean: The righteousness of God comes altogether from faith, but in such a way that there appear constant growth and constant greater clarity, as it is written in II Corinthians 3:18: “We...are changed into the same image from glory to glory.” The words “from faith to faith” therefore signify that the believer grows in faith more and more, so that he who is justified becomes more and more righteous (*in his life*).” Martin Luther, *Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, trans. J. T. Mueller, 5th printing (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1976) p. 41.

⁴ Rom. 12:3; Eph. 2:8; Heb. 12:2; and the *“whoever”* in John 3:16 implies the measure of faith to make the choice.

⁵ The Greek word *pisteuon*, translated believes, is a present active participle. It is not in the past tense. It is a current condition.

received? By faith and by faith alone! John 3:18 “*He who*” (what) “*believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*” I don’t know how God could have made it any clearer. “*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*”⁶ And the faith must be placed in Christ.⁷ “*He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.*” Is the condemnation based on how bad his sins were? No, it all hinges on this issue of faith. So “*The just shall live by faith.*” Faith in Christ is essential to “*the gospel of Christ.*”

(2) In Rom. 1:17 “*the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith...*” It’s not just an initial experience in faith; it is a life of faith. Abraham is the Father of Faith and Paul uses his faith to explain his doctrine of salvation by grace through faith.⁸ In Abraham we see the righteousness of God revealed in him “*from faith to faith.*” It was an act of faith (confident obedience to God) for Abraham to uproot his family in Ur of Chaldees and set out on a journey in which he didn’t even know the destination. Abraham trusted God many years for the birth of Isaac and the fulfillment of God’s promise. It was “*from faith to faith.*” His greatest act of faith came when he offered up Isaac on the altar accounting that God was able to raise him from the dead. “*For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith....*” The Amplified Bible says, “*...springing from faith and leading to faith [disclosed through the way of faith that arouses to more faith].*” So is talking about a righteousness that includes both justification and sanctification.⁹ I am extremely concerned about multitudes of people who are relying on an initial experience; but are not walking with God. That simply does not match up with salvation as revealed in Scripture. I absolutely believe in the born again experience. “*You must be born again.*”¹⁰ But why has that become the end of the matter, rather than the beginning of a life of faith? Birth is the beginning of something which should continue in like kind. The New International Version translates this “*...a righteousness that is by faith from first to last....*”

Gal 3:11 says, “*But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for ‘the just shall live by faith.’*” In this passage Paul is contrasting an effort to be right with God through one’s own works verses justification by faith. We talked a lot about this in a previous message so I will only touch upon it. We can’t save ourselves by good works and we can’t keep ourselves saved by good works. Salvation is through faith in Christ and His work in our behalf. So believing in Him and continuing to believe in Him is the key to our salvation. “*The just shall live by faith*”—not just begin their journey by faith, but live by faith, as a way of life.

The other place where this statement is made in the New Testament is found in the book of Hebrews. The author of this epistle is encouraging Christians to not lose heart and to not turn away from Christianity. So in Heb. 10:35-39 he writes, “*Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. 36 For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 37 ‘For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. 38 Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.’ 39 But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*” Let’s look at our statement in this

⁶ Heb. 11:6.

⁷ There are not many roads/ways of salvation; there is only one: Christ (John 10:1-11; Acts 4:12).

⁸ Romans 4.

⁹ Rom 1:17 (from Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1997 by BibleSoft & Robertson’s Word Pictures in the New Testament. Copyright (c) 1985 by Broadman Press).

¹⁰ John 3:5-7.

context. (1) It is quoted after an admonition to “*not cast away your confidence.*” NIV says, “*So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere....*”

Earlier in this epistle we read, “*but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end*” (Heb. 3:6). That verse does not say we are His house no matter what we do once we’re born again. The little two-letter word “*if*” makes the statement conditional; conditional on what? “*if we hold fast the confidence....*”¹¹ Heb. 3 then makes reference to Israel’s unfaithfulness in the wilderness where they did not hold fast their confidence in God. Heb. 3:12-14 “*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; 13 but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.*” The focus is still on the issue of faith. “*Beware, brethren,* (is he talking to unbelievers or to Christians?) “*lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief (and the unbelief would cause the Christian to do what?) in departing from the living God.*”¹² “*The just shall live by faith.*” What I am teaching this morning is the centrality of faith when it comes to salvation.

(2) The promise is to those who endure to the end. Heb. 10:36 “*For you have need of (what) endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.*” The idea that it doesn’t matter how you live as long as you have been born again is very foreign to these passages. Verse 38, “*Now the just shall live by faith; But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.*” If anyone shrinks back or withdraws, God “*has no pleasure in him.*” So can I run to God; get born again; then withdraw back into an ungodly lifestyle and everything be ok? I have a hard time finding that here. I find warning after warning in Hebrews admonishing us to stay faithful to God unto the end. I am sounding the prophetic alarm, to people who are living in a false confidence—based upon a past experience with no real follow through.

Heb. 10:39 does add, “*But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, (destruction) but of those who believe to the saving of the soul.*” Make your calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10). *Believe to the saving of the soul.* Believe and keep believing.

Faith is a deep trust in Christ in the heart—in the core of our being. We trust His work in our behalf. We trust His sacrifice on the cross as payment for our sins. We trust His resurrection as the basis of our hope. We trust His intercession for us as our Great High Priest. We rely upon His words. We trust His directives enough to actually do them. According to James, the evidence of faith in the heart is obedience to God. If there is no obedience, then it is dead faith.¹³

Faith is a decision of the will, not just a feeling. Your feelings will go up and down. One day you may “feel” saved and the next day you may not “feel” saved. When we talk about faith, we are not talking about an emotional state. We are talking about trusting from the heart. Rom. 10:9 “*that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. 10 For with the heart one believes unto*

¹¹ Note “if” conditional clause in other New Testament passages such as John 15:6, 7, 10, 14; Col. 1:21-23 and 1 Thess. 3:7-8.

¹² 1 Tim. 1:19-20 is an example of this.

¹³ James 2:17-26.

righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.” Faith is a settled conviction in the heart.¹⁴

We are exploring the phrase *“The just shall live by faith.”* What is characteristic of a person in right standing with God? That person lives *“by faith.”* We have looked at that statement in the three places it is used in the New Testament. All of those are a quote of Hab. 2:4.

Let’s now look at that passage. Hab. 2:1-3 *“I will stand my watch And set myself on the rampart, And watch to see what He will say to me, And what I will answer when I am corrected. 2 Then the LORD answered me and said: ‘Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it. 3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry. Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.”* In chapter 1 Habakkuk is complaining to God about ungodly Jews who are oppressing others and seemingly getting away with it. Habakkuk is asking why these evil people seem to get away with it. God tells Habakkuk that He is about to judge these people; and He will use the Chaldeans (people who lived in southern Babylon (modern Iraq)) to bring that judgement about. This was not what Habakkuk wanted to hear or expected to hear. Those people were more ungodly than the ones he was initially complaining about. So he goes to God again with his complaint about the lack of justice.

In Hab. 2 he is waiting on God for an answer and half afraid of the correction that he would get from God for his complaining. In Hab. 2:2 God begins to answer him. God tells him that justice will ultimately prevail. However, it will come in God’s timing—which you know by experience can take a while. Hab. 2:3, *“For the vision is yet for an appointed time; But at the end it will speak, and it will not lie. Though it tarries, wait for it; Because it will surely come, It will not tarry.”* The proud ungodly person is not upright in God’s eyes. He will eventually be judged. In the meantime, you will simply need to trust Me. *“But the just shall live by his faith.”* Hab. 2:4 in The Living Bible, *“Note this: Wicked men trust themselves alone [as these Chaldeans do], and fail; but the righteous man trusts in me and lives!”* So, it’s talking about a stance of faith, living in reliance on God’s faithfulness, trusting Him day-by-day. *“The just shall live by faith.”* This is something we continue in. It is the posture we take in life.

It is by faith that we come into the kingdom; and it is by faith that we continue in the kingdom. In Romans 9-11 Paul talks about Israel’s unbelief and rejection of Christ. He grieves over their failure to receive the gospel as a nation. Because of their unbelief they were cut off. In Rom 11:19 he addresses Gentile Christians with these words, *“You will say then, ‘Branches were broken off that I might be grafted in.’ 20 Well said. Because of unbelief they were broken off, and you stand by faith. (Where is the security of the believer? It is found in a stance of faith toward Christ). Do not be haughty, but fear. 21 For if God did not spare the natural branches, He may not spare you either. 22 Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise you also will be cut off.”*

¹⁴ “Though belief does involve response to a truth or a series of truths, this response is not mere intellectual assent but rather wholehearted involvement in the truth believed. To believe in Christ is to commit oneself to him.” Rom 1:16 (from The Wycliffe Bible Commentary, Electronic Database. Copyright (c) 1962 by Moody Press).

So my first point is this: I. It is by faith that we continue in the kingdom of God.

II. Your faith is the focus of Satan's attacks.

If he can destroy your faith in Christ, then he has destroyed you. He does that through lying arguments (ideas and philosophies that undermine the truth in your mind).¹⁵ He does that by leading you into temptation. He does that by opposing and discouraging you. Satan wants to destroy your faith in the Lord anyway he can.

He did that to Adam and Eve. Listen in on his conversation with Eve in Gen 3:1-6.

"Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said to the woman, 'Has God indeed said, 'You shall not eat of every tree of the garden'?"

2 And the woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; 3 but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, 'You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.'"

4 Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.' 6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate. She also gave to her husband with her, and he ate."

The serpent's strategy was to get her questioning the truth of what God had said; and to get her questioning God's goodwill toward her.

Verse 4 *"Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'"* God had told Adam and Eve that the consequence of disobedience would be death. But Satan is convincing her that it won't happen. Not only will she not die, but she will actually benefit from stepping over the boundary God had established. This is a major component of temptation in our lives. God has said in Gal 6:7 *"...whatsoever a man sows, that he will also reap."* It's another way of saying, "Nobody gets away with anything when it's all said and done." But the Deceiver comes and whispers in your ear, nobody will know; you won't be caught; just do it." Most of the time, before a person sins, he is deceived into thinking the consequence of disobeying will be less than the pleasure of the sin itself. *"...the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'"*

Then comes the questioning of God's goodness. Verse 5 *"For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."* Why would God keep back something like that from me? Why wouldn't He let me have it if it's going to increase my stature and knowledge? There is a subtle accusation against God in all this. "If God really had your best interest at heart, He would give it to you. But He is withholding good things from you. So go ahead and take it."

Before Eve sinned, her faith in God was undermined. Her faith in the truthfulness and reliability of God's word was questioned. Her faith in God's goodness and goodwill toward her was questioned.

When you're in a trial, remember two things. (1) God's word is completely reliable. It is more reliable than what circumstances say. It is more reliable than what other people say. It is more reliable than what your reasoning or your emotions might tell you. (2) God's love toward you

¹⁵ 2Cor. 10:5; 11:3; Col. 2:8. Also examine Satan's attack on Jesus in Luke 4:1-13.

is everlasting. He cares about your wellbeing more than you are capable of caring for yourself. He is God and you're just a human. God is for you and not against you.¹⁶ You can trust Him to always look out for your best interest.

Shortly before Jesus was arrested He told the disciples that they would all forsake Him in the midst of the ordeal. Peter insisted that regardless of what all the rest would do, he would stand firm with the Lord. Jesus said to him, "*Simon, Simon! Indeed, Satan has asked for you, that he may sift you as wheat. 32 But I have prayed for you, that your faith should not fail; and when you have returned to Me, strengthen your brethren*" (Luke 22:31-32). Jesus didn't pray that Peter would not fail. He prayed that Peter's faith would not fail. Peter did fail at one level. He denied the Lord three times. But at a deeper level, his faith did not fail. Even in his stumblings, he still believed in his heart. But the focal point of the battle was Peter's faith. By faith we stand.

III. You are called to nurture your faith. By way of reminder, let me share with you a few ways we do that.

(1) Draw near to God. Do not draw back from God no matter what is happening your life. When we're trapped in a sin, we are tempted to draw back from God. But where else can you go for the answer? If you're failing miserably, keep coming to God for help anyway. James 4:8 gives us this promise. "*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you.*" It's in our nearness to God that we receive strength.

Heb. 10:22 "*let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith....*"

Col 4:2 "*Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.*" Keep praying even if you feel like it's not doing any good—sometimes that's when it's doing the most good.

Jude 20-21 "*But you, beloved, building yourselves up on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Spirit, 21 keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.*"

Nurture your faith by drawing near to the Lord in prayer and worship.

(2) Keep meeting with God's people and encouraging one another in the faith. This is especially important as we proceed toward the last days.

Heb. 10:23 "*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*" One of the problems with church is that it is filled with imperfect people. Sometimes those people rub you the wrong way. Sometimes they say things that hurt your feelings. Has anybody here ever not wanted to go to church? The story is told of the mother who is trying to get her son to go to church on Sunday morning. She wakes him up and says, "Son it's getting late, it's time to get dressed and go to church. The son moaned and told her he didn't want to go to church. Of course, she insisted that he go anyway. He looked up at her and said, "Give me one good reason that I should." She answered back, "The Bible tells us to forsake not the assembling of ourselves together. You need to be in the word. And besides all that, you're the pastor and people are expecting you to show up." I've seen a lot of people over the years get offended in church and stop going. I have never seen that work out well. Of course, there can be physical

¹⁶ John 3:17; 10:10; Rom. 8:31-31.

reasons that people can't go to church. But we need the influence of one another in our walk of faith.

(3) Stay in the Word.

Paul gave this instruction in 1 Tim 4:13-16. *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”*

It matters what you believe and it matters that you know why you believe it. That instruction comes, after this warning in verse one of that chapter. *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”*

As our society becomes more pluralistic and as our churches become more Bible ignorant, we have the perfect storm for that to happen. The new mayor of London is a Muslim. It's coming to a neighborhood near you. Deceiving spirits are penetrating our borders. Are we equipped to deal with the deception? *“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”*

(4) Keep your eyes on the Lord.

Heb 12:1-2 *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith....”* That passage goes on to talk about the things Jesus endured on the cross and how He kept His eye on the end result: *“who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* Don't focus on the trial; focus on what God has in store for you through Jesus. *“...run with endurance the race that is set before us, 2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith....”* Jesus will get you through, if you keep your eyes on Him.

Pray