

# HERESIES, ANCIENT and MODERN.

## Lecture 3 – Jesus + Something = Nothing

### INTRODUCTION

As Christianity spread from Jerusalem and around the known world, Believers experienced assaults from without and within. Christians had to learn what it means to live in a hostile world under the rule of a pagan government. But Christians also found themselves caught up in internal issues, namely, they had to figure out their relationship with Judaism. We need to remember that Jesus was Jewish. We need to remember that the first Christians were Jewish. We need to remember that both Jesus (*"For truly, I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is accomplished"* (Matthew 5:18, ESV)); and Paul taught the value of the Old Testament Law (*"All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,"* (2 Timothy 3:16, ESV). This created a problem: How does Christianity relate to the Law?

"Some Christians arose and demanded, in effect, that Gentiles had to become Jews in order to be true Christians. They insisted on circumcision and other Jewish legal requirements and frowned on social contact with 'unclean' Gentiles."<sup>1</sup> This group were called, in the New Testament: Judaizers.

Ignatius in the first century wrote, "Christianity did not embrace Judaism, but Judaism Christianity."<sup>2</sup>

### THE JUDAIZERS - ANCIENT

Turn with me to Acts 15. The first verse explains the foundational belief of the Judaizers. *"But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."* (Acts 15:1, ESV, Emphasis mine) Salvation was conditioned upon circumcision. This caused debate and conflict and the Church convened the first Council to determine what is orthodox. Notice again the Judaizer's position: *"But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.""* (Acts 15:5, ESV, Emphasis mine)

The alternate position was voiced by Peter: *"But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.""* (Acts 15:11, ESV). The end of the matter was to retain the truth that a person is saved by grace through faith – alone. ***Those who hold to this truth believe that God justifies the sinner on the sole condition of faith in Christ.***

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<sup>1</sup> Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity, Ed. Dr. Tim Dowley, Lion Publishing, Herts, England, 1977, Page 97

<sup>2</sup> Schaff, Philip. Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1 - Enhanced Version (Early Church Fathers) . Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Kindle Edition.

This movement did not fade away after the Jerusalem Council. It intensified, so much so that Paul had to write a letter the churches of Galatia to put this firestorm out. It is in Galatians that we get our word “Judaizers”. *“But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’”* (Galatians 2:14, ESV). That phrase in the ESV, “to live like Jews” is **ἰουδαῖζω** [ee-oo-dah-id-zo]<sup>3</sup> in the Greek New Testament, otherwise translated to Judaize, to make Jewish.

Paul’s response to these Judaizers was direct and to the point. Notice Galatians 1:6–9 (ESV)

*“<sup>6</sup> I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— <sup>7</sup> not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. <sup>8</sup> But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. <sup>9</sup> As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.”* In chapter 2, verse 15 and 16, Paul is very plain: *“We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”* (Galatians 2:15–16, ESV)

Someone might ask, “So what?” So, what as long as you have faith in Jesus as part of the solution? Paul answered that in verse 21: *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”* Paul is clear, to add anything to grace is heresy, it’s condemnable. Paul uses the word ἀνάθεμα [anathema], to be condemned. To add anything to faith alone renders the death of Jesus Christ as purposeless. The Bible is clear that the attempt to add human works to God’s grace overlooks the very meaning of *grace*. Here’s a sampling of the orthodox position:

- Ephesians 2:8–9 (ESV), <sup>8</sup> For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup> not a result of works, so that no one may boast.
- 2 Timothy 1:9 (ESV), <sup>9</sup> who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,
- Titus 3:4–5 (ESV), <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

And this position isn’t one for the Gentiles and one for the Jews. Everyone regardless of ethnicity is saved by grace, through faith, alone. Note:

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<sup>3</sup> Strong, J. (1995). [\*Enhanced Strong’s Lexicon\*](#). Woodside Bible Fellowship.

- Romans 3:29–30 (ESV), <sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.
- Romans 4:16 (ESV), <sup>16</sup> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,
- Galatians 3:27–29 (ESV), <sup>27</sup> For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup> There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup> And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.

## THE JUDAIZERS – MODERN

Anyone who adds any human works or merit to the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone is a modern *Judaizer*. Anyone who adds any human works or merit to the truth of salvation by grace alone through faith alone is proclaiming a false gospel that is no gospel at all. As early as the year 100 A.D., Ignatius, in a letter to the Magnesians, wrote:

*“It is absurd to speak of Jesus Christ with the tongue, and to cherish in the mind a Judaism which has now come to an end. For where there is Christianity there cannot be Judaism. For Christ is one, in whom every nation that believes, and every tongue that confesses, is gathered unto God. And those that were of a stony heart have become the children of Abraham, the friend of God; and in his seed all those have been blessed who were ordained to eternal life in Christ.”<sup>4</sup>*

Today there are many “so-called Christian” religious organizations that teach salvation by works, or salvation by grace through faith, plus works. There are several, but the most prominent and influential religion that teaches this mix of grace and works is the Roman Catholic Church. J. Oswald Sanders writes, “There is a notion widely current that the Roman Catholic and Protestant Churches are simply different branches of the same Church . . . They stand, however,” Sanders writes, “For totally, fundamentally, irreconcilably different religions which lead to goals as far separated as hell is from heaven.”<sup>5</sup> For that reason I will say some brief things about the Roman church. One should not forget that all works-based religions are in the same predicament.

Now I always must insert this stipulation when discussing things like this. The criticism is levied against Roman Catholicism, not Catholics. This is not a judgment of a person's heart or soul's destiny. Religious organizations publish their theological positions and therefore it is right and proper to assess them in relation to the Word of God. This is a critique of an organization, not a person.

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<sup>4</sup> Schaff, Philip. Ante-Nicene Fathers Volume 1 - Enhanced Version (Early Church Fathers) . Christian Classics Ethereal Library. Kindle Edition.

<sup>5</sup> Sanders, J. Oswald, Heresies Ancient and Modern, Marshall, Morgan and Scott, Ltd., London, England, 1957

At the Council of Trent<sup>6</sup> (which Catholics believe to be infallible) in the 16th century, the Catholic Church explicitly denied the idea of salvation by faith alone. Catholics have always held that certain sacraments are necessary for salvation. Canon IX in the Council of Trent says,

*“If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.”*

Notice Canon XII. “If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ’s sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.”

And, on the contrary, in Session IV, Canon IV we read, “If any one saith, that the sacraments of the New Law are not necessary unto salvation, but superfluous; and that, without them, or without the desire thereof, men obtain of God, through faith alone, the grace of justification;—though all (the sacraments) are not indeed necessary for every individual; let him be anathema.”

The issues for the 1st-century Judaizers included circumcision and other Jewish ceremonies. The issues for modern-day Catholics are baptism, confession, and other sacraments. The works considered necessary may have changed, but both Judaizers and Catholics attempt to merit God’s grace through the performance of ritualistic acts.

Although the Roman Church is best known for this mix of grace and works, they certainly aren’t alone. Any group that makes salvation conditioned upon anything except by the finished work of Christ, by faith alone in Christ, teaches heresy.

## PERSONAL APPLICATION

Christians can at times creep into this thinking. “If I do this; if I do such and such, maybe God will love me more; maybe He will surely accept me.” We sin and fail the God we love and think that we might be disowned. We forget about our position in Christ; we forget the true Gospel. We forget the promises of the New Covenant. We forget that salvation is based upon works – but not ours. Paul wrote in Colossians 1:21–23 (ESV),

*“<sup>21</sup> And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, <sup>22</sup> he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, <sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”*

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<sup>6</sup> The Council of Trent, held between 1545 and 1563 in Trent, was the 19th ecumenical council of the Catholic Church. Prompted by the Protestant Reformation, it has been described as the embodiment of the Counter-Reformation

Not “shifting from the hope of the Gospel” is the call. Elyse Fitzpatrick writes, “The hope of the gospel is simply this then: that Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son, was born in a lowly manger, lived a perfect life, suffered from the moment of his first breath, was indescribably shamed and cruelly tortured, and then died without the comfort of his Father or the angels on Calvary’s cruel tree. After three days in darkness and the tomb he rose again, still in human flesh, and then after forty days he ascended to the Father. Because of this, we have an entirely new identity, not one based on our accomplishments, our self-respect, the accolades of others, our own good works. We are completely and irrevocably justified; we have been entirely forgiven, reconciled, redeemed. We will have eternal life with him, and everything we go through now is in some way tied to these truths.”<sup>7</sup>

Remember this math: **Jesus + Nothing = Everything; but Jesus + Something = Nothing**

We need to beware of any encroachment on the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. We often sing in our church:

*My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness  
I dare not trust the sweetest frame  
But wholly lean on Jesus' name*<sup>8</sup>

And

*In Christ alone my hope is found  
He is my light my strength my song . . .  
In Christ alone who took on flesh  
. . . The wrath of God was satisfied  
For every sin on Him was laid  
Here in the death of Christ I live.*<sup>9</sup>

And all this is by grace through faith alone, in Christ alone.

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<sup>7</sup> Fitzpatrick, Elyse M.. Because He Loves Me: How Christ Transforms Our Daily Life (p. 191). Crossway. Kindle Edition.

<sup>8</sup> CCLI Song # 4255633, Charlie Hall | Edward Mote | Kendall Combes | Trent Austin | William Batchelder Bradbury, © Words: Public Domain, Music: 2004 sixsteps Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing), worshiptogether.com songs (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)

<sup>9</sup> CCLI Song # 3350395 Keith Getty | Stuart Townend, © 2001 Thankyou Music (Admin. by Capitol CMG Publishing)