



The Reflector

Published and edited monthly in the interest of calling people back to the Bible
by Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

October 2015

Paul's Unusual Use of the Words: "Faith" and "Law"

Edward O. Bragwell, Sr.

"But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster. (Galatians 3:23-25 KJV)

This is an excellent example of the unusual way the apostle Paul often uses the words "faith" and "law" in his writings. The context shows that he uses both words in a more specialized way than they are usually used. Understanding this goes a long way in understanding the Lord's scheme of redemption and Paul's teaching on salvation "by faith."

The epistle to the Galatians reveals that it was written out of Paul's concern that the Galatians were in danger of turning away from the truth of the gospel or perhaps more specifically corrupting the gospel by mixing it with Judaism. (1:8-10; 3:1; 5:1-7). A careful reading of the book will see that he uses the term "faith" to refer to the system of faith revealed in the gospel and the word "law" to refer to the system of law revealed in the law of Moses. He does not mean that the "law" does not have any element of faith (believing God and His word) in it. Nor does it mean that the "faith" does not have any element of law (command or rules to obey) in it. We can see this from analyzing chapter 3:

In verse 23, he speaks of, "before faith came" and in verse 25, "But after that faith is come." What is this period *before faith* came? It was the time when Paul and the other Jews (note his use of "us" and "we") were shut up unto faith while under

the law as a schoolmaster or tutor until faith came. And what is the period of time *after faith* came? It is the time after they were freed from the schoolmaster. The faith that is *afterwards* revealed is the fulfillment of the promise to Abraham that "in thee shall all nations be blessed" (v. 8 – also see vv. 16-18). But after that "faith" (the fulfillment of that promise) came they were no longer "under the law."

Does this mean that those under the law had no faith of any kind? Of course not. The Old Testament speaks often of the Jews believing or being told to believe the Lord and his word. The Hebrew writer points out that all those, in chapter 11, who had "obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise." The promise of which he spoke is the same promise spoken of in Galatians – the promise to Abraham that through his seed all nations would be blessed. Those under the law had not yet received that "faith" – meaning the ultimate object of their faith, the promise made to Abraham. So, certainly there was "faith" during the time of the Old Testament law. But that is different from the "faith" of which Paul spoke. The faith of which Paul spoke came after the law – faith in that Abrahamic promise (the seed, Christ). Thus, the time he spoke of as "before faith came" is before Christ came and did his redemptive work (as per the promise to Abraham) and "after that faith is come" refers to the time now after Christ come and done his work and made that redemption available to all people – Jew and Gentile alike.

Abraham had faith in the promise and was

justified by that faith long before the law came. He was not justified by “the law” of which Paul spoke. That law did not exist when Abraham lived. But he had “faith” in the promise that through his seed (descendant) all people would be blessed – that descendant was Christ (3:16). His faith in that promise was so strong that when asked to kill the son through whom the promise was to come, he proceeded to do it, believing that the promise would be fulfilled even if God had to raise Isaac from the dead (Hebrews 11:18-19). The “faith” that came was that system of faith that came through Jesus. That “faith” did not come with the law, but after the law, with the fulfillment of the promise.

Verse 18 shows that the faith he is talking about is faith in the promise to Abraham. Here he states that if the inheritance (salvation/righteousness) were of the law (of Moses) it could not be of “the promise” (The one made to Abraham). Abraham was justified or made righteous by his believing and *acting* on the promise given to him. Especially in this context, “of faith” and “of promise” means the same thing. The blessing that he was promised was to bring salvation to all nations (Jews and Gentiles), not just the Jews. (V. 28) The basis of that inheritance would be faith in the Christ – as the fulfillment of the promise. It was Abraham’s faith in that promise, long before it came to pass, that justified him. He believed the promise and acted on it before the Jews received the law. So the faith (in the promise) by which he was pronounced righteous predated the law. Now we can be pronounced righteous by faith in Christ, as the fulfillment of that promise, when we accept Him and obey his will.

Verse 12 says, “And the law is not of faith: but, the man that doeth them shall live in them.” Paul is saying that “the law” (the system under the law) is not of “faith” (the faith system in Christ), that provides for redemption. Under the law of Moses (before faith came) the only way that one could “live” (spiritually) would be to perfectly do the law. No one did. Hence, the need for redemption. The only way to “live” spiritually is by the redeeming

benefits of the system of faith in Christ – called simply “faith” by Paul.

Verse 26 points out that they (Galatian Christians) were children of God “by faith” (in Christ as the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promise) as opposed to being children of God by the “law” (children born into fleshly Israel). Then in verse 27, he showed how one becomes a child of God “after that faith has come”: “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ” So, the “faith” spoken of by Paul requires meeting the conditions of salvation. A child of God by faith is a penitent baptized believer (See Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38). This also makes them heirs according to “the promise” made to Abraham (v. 29) – “children of God by faith.” This is contrasted with being children of God according to the law – being a child of God by natural birth into Israel.

Both systems have elements of “law” of some kind. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” (Romans 3:27) In the change from the old Testament system to the New Testament system, the Hebrew writer says it is a “change of law” (Heb. 7:12). Before the change there was law and after the change was law.

I thank God that I (a Gentile) along with my Jewish friends can all be children of God in one body by the same process. How? Not by the system of “law” revealed in the Old Testament, but by the system of “faith” promised Abraham and fully revealed in the New Testament – as Paul succinctly put it, not by “law” but by “faith.” ■

A matter of emphasis ...

In my lifetime emphasis in preaching and Bible study has gradually shifted away from preparing people to endure hardship, deny the pleasures of the world, living godly lives, in preparation for living with the Lord in the world to come; toward that of fixing the problems of this world, seeing people as *hurting* rather than *lost*, relieving physical and mental pain, extolling the *earthly* benefits of living morally upright lives, and creating happiness for the *here and now*. This is not good. EOB

Are We Allowing Modern Technology to Take Us Too Far?

R. J. Evans

The career of one of our church members has taken him to all parts of this country, as well as, different countries around the world. He and his family have been members of a number of congregations, and he has visited many local churches over the years. He enjoys talking about the Word of God and the Lord's work. In a recent conversation, he made the comment to me that he had concerns about some of today's gospel preachers. I asked what he had in mind and he told me that it appears that a growing number of preachers seem to be spending more time and placing more emphasis on PowerPoint, than on the Word. My response was that I have had similar concerns over the past few years.

In my nearly 50 years of preaching (it will be in March, 2016), I have used a chalk board, a white board, charts, an overhead projector, and for the last 15 years, I have used a PowerPoint projector. I believe all of these can be effective aids and good tools in preaching the gospel. But, I must also say that at times I have heard great preachers preach great sermons with just the Bible in their hand---and many never opened their Bible, they quoted scripture after scripture.

I believe we can effectively use visual aids in our preaching and teaching. Jesus used "visual aids" such as lilies, a coin, etc. to teach lessons on certain subjects. He also used parables in some of His teachings.

This brother's concerns reminds me of what happened many years ago when I first started using an overhead projector. We had a brother who had deep concerns about using it. He feared preachers would start using images of some of the paintings of Jesus in their preaching. I remember assuring him that I would not do that. He also expressed that he was afraid that the overhead projector would be just the beginning of what he called "having picture shows in church." Perhaps, his concerns were more "prophetic" than any of us

realized at that time.

In having used the PowerPoint for so long, I can see how it would be very easy to get caught up in using a lot of beautiful, colorful scenes, pictures, animations, videos, cartoons, etc. Please don't misunderstand, I am not saying that using pictures, graphics, background scenes, maps or charts in our presentations is wrong. No, not at all! But I am saying that we must guard against allowing what we present to become a type of entertainment. In the entertainment world, if we go to a concert, not only do we see the artist on stage, we also see large screens behind and above him with colorful scenes, videos, animations, etc. My barber is a member of a large denominational church. In some of our discussions, he has spoken of how entertaining preachers have become in using animated, video PowerPoint presentations in their sermons. Unfortunately, he thinks entertainment provided by preachers and churches is great. Thus, in our preaching of the gospel we must guard against succumbing to the entertainment craze of our present culture. As speakers, or as listeners, we need to be cautious. In our Bible classes and worship assemblies, it is the Word of God that is to be taught and preached (2 Tim. 4:1; Rom. 1:15-16; 10:14-15; 1 Cor. 1:21). When we turn our PowerPoint presentations into entertainment, it then occupies a similar place of entertainment as does unscriptural instrumental music. I did a little research on effectively using PowerPoint and here are some points that I believe are worth considering: If used incorrectly, it can become more of a distraction, than a helpful aid. For example, if it is "busy" with too much information, it becomes a distraction. In presentations, it is best to leave animations out. In the business world, Steve Jobs was known for giving some of the most audience captivating presentations, but he never used animations in any of his slides. Some studies advise against using

cartoons, which can also be distracting. With this I believe we run the risk of taking away from the seriousness that should characterize any Bible subject. Hence, PowerPoint slides should be used to supplement and reinforce the preaching of the Word of God, and not serve as a “crutch” or source of entertainment. It is a tool or aid---it isn't content. So as gospel preachers, do we want to be known for faithfully preaching and teaching the Word of God, or known for our colorful, slick, sensational PowerPoint presentations? Someone described a preacher to me once by saying, “He is not much of a preacher, but his PowerPoint presentations are beautiful and impressive.”

If we have gotten to the point where the audience is sitting there waiting for us to entertain them with our beautiful, colorful, pictures, scenes, videos, animations, etc., more than they are interested in hearing the Word—have we preachers and teachers contributed to this problem? *Are we allowing modern technology to take us too far?* While visual aids can be helpful, let's avoid any tendency to make them entertaining, and becoming too dependent on them—thinking we have to have them in order to effectively “Preach the Word!” Surely, whatever aids we use, the focus should always be on *Scripture*. For whatever these thoughts are worth—something to think about, brethren! ■

If I Had But One Sermon ...

Robert F. Turner

One Saturday night in the dim past some unknown preacher strove desperately for a sermon idea. He tore his hair and beat the desk with his fist, and said, “Oh, if I had but one sermon to preach tomorrow — if I had...” Then, he “saw the light” and next day he presented a masterful oration on fleeting time and opportunity, on the vital themes that would be preached if this sermon were his last.

And since then, thousands of sermons have sprung from this imagined situation. I have built a

few of my own on this theme — usually emphasizing man's lost condition, the redemption in Christ, and closing with, “If this were your last opportunity to obey, what then?” It will lather!

But in recent years I have re-examined this subject. The great final sermon, from the preacher's viewpoint, may present a summation of his finest thoughts, emphasizing the very heart of the gospel of Christ, and yet fail to make the application most needed by those who are hearing their last sermon. Now my question becomes, If I Have But One Sermon To Preach — will I strive for a preacher masterpiece, or will I go for the lost souls that are before me?

The finest sermon is not necessarily the most pleasant to hear, or the most complimented. If I am covetous, mistreating my brethren, allowing the cares of this world to overshadow my service to God; the truly great sermon **for me** is one that makes me see my ungodly ways and brings me to repentance. The preacher has done me no favor if he is content to tickle my ears when he might have saved my soul. Nor has he done the job his noble calling demands of him.

This is not to say browbeating or harangue make the best sermons. The best is that which meets the spiritual and eternal needs of the hearers. Nathan's masterpiece was a simple parable that ended, “Thou art the man” (2 Sam. 12:7)

If you have but one sermon for me, seek me where I am; and find me with a message that touches my heart and causes me to say, “I will arise, and go to my Father...” (Lu. 15:18)

Plain Talk...Feb 1980 ■

Have you noticed how much more irritated people become when they think someone is trying to bind something on them that God has loosed than they become when they think someone is trying to loose things God has bound? Could this be because most people don't like their free-wheeling life styles cramped?