

Bible Reading Challenge 47: THE CHURCH – BY FAITH ALONE

Ages 4-8

Key verse: Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Romans 5:1

Main Idea/Out Loud Intro:

Last week we talked about how the Old Testament pointed to Jesus—while there were many prophets, priests and kings before Him, He was and still is our true prophet, priest and king. He's the one who will never die, never fail us, never sin like David or lead people to idols like Aaron did. He is the rock on which we stand!

When Paul wrote his letters to the early Christians, there was another really important thing he wanted them to see. A lot of people—whether Jewish people a long time ago or even people alive today—believe they can please God by being good. But Paul wrote that it's not our good deeds that get us to heaven, but our faith in Christ's good deeds on our behalf, including dying for our sins on the cross. Paul realized that if keeping the law made you good enough for God, then what value did the blood of Christ really have? His letter to the Galatians is all about this question, and it's the strongest letter Paul ever wrote.

We can see why—even today, many people think if you do more good things than bad things, you're a good person. No *no* NO!.says Paul. We are justified by faith alone. That is, God looks at us through Christ and covers us with His goodness. That was how God looked at Abraham, thousands of years before Christ appeared, and that's how he looks at us today. We'll be reading a lot about Abraham this week, and also about "flesh." **Flesh**, as Paul uses that word, doesn't necessarily mean our bodies but rather our human pride. We want to think of ourselves as good, and impress others (even God!) with our goodness. "By faith alone" means that we've understood we can never be good enough to please God on our own, but in Christ we are righteous. But it gets even better: because we embrace Jesus as our only savior, God embraces *us* as His children.

Reading for this week: Acts 21:17-22:22; Philippians 3:4-9; Romans 3:21-5:11; Galatians 3-4

Further references: Jeremiah 31:31-34

Questions to Think and Talk about:

1. Who are the real children of Abraham? Why was Abraham counted as righteous, and how did he show his faith, according to our reading in Romans and Galatians this week?
2. Why are those who put their faith in the law under a curse? (see Gal. 3:10-14)
3. If we're justified by faith alone, should we ignore the law? (see Matt. 20:39-40, John 14:15, Rom. 3:31 and Gal. 6:2 before answering.) If not, why do we keep it? What does Jer. 31:31-34 say about the law?
4. Read what Paul says about himself in Acts 22:3-5 and Phil. 3:4-9. List his accomplishments and "gold stars." What does he say about them now?
5. What's the difference between believers before Christ and believers now? (see Gal. 3:23-4:7)
6. Galatians 4:21-30 is an allegory, like Pilgrim's Progress: each character and place mentioned represents something else. Discuss what Paul means by the slave woman (Hagar), the free woman (Sarah), Ishmael and Isaac, Mt. Sinai and Jerusalem.

Activities:

- **Object Lesson: Weigh It:** Make a scale with household objects as in this [web tutorial](#), and try writing some of your good deeds and bad deeds on paper. Talk about how many people think that if they can just have more good deeds than bad deeds, they'll be good enough for God. But of course, God's scales are very different. Pull out your bathroom scale, and let try

standing on it. As a holy God, the Lord must punish any sin. Either we are holy and sinless like Christ, or we are sinful and deserve to be separated from Him forever. But by our faith in Christ, all the weight of our sin is gone!

- **Write It:** The Jewish Christians of Paul's day were concerned about things like circumcision. They thought that you couldn't be a Christian without it. Write down all the things you're tempted to trust in to make you "justified". Maybe being good at sports or doing everything write in school?
- Make a vocabulary card for **justification**.