

Galatians 3:6-14

...just as Abraham "believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Therefore know that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, "In you all the nations shall be blessed." So then those who are of faith are blessed with believing Abraham. For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse; for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who does not continue in all things which are written in the book of the law, to do them." But that no one is justified by the law in the sight of God is evident, for "the just shall live by faith." Yet the law is not of faith, but "the man who does them shall live by them." Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree"), that the blessing of Abraham might come upon the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Living between the Steps.

I read where a university professor was greatly affected by the apparent conduct of a soldier who was assigned to provide transportation for him. The soldier, upon picking up the professor at the airport, would constantly disappear into the crowd on errands of mercy; helping a lost child, aiding a lady overburdened with luggage, giving directions to a confused couple. When the professor asked where the soldier learned to live in that manner, the answer stuck for life: "While on duty in Viet Nam my job was to clear mine fields. I saw many of my friends blown up and I never knew whether my next step would be my last. So I just learned to live between the steps. I learned to get everything I could out of the moments between when I picked my foot up and when I put it down. Every step I took was a whole new world, and I guess I've lived that way ever since."

The operating principle of the gospel involves just such an approach to life. The principle is stated in Romans 1:17; "The just shall live by faith." Having previously defined the people called "the just" (last week's column), consider now the distinguished plateau in which they "shall live".

Paul raises the standard of life from its regular manner as defined by the usual word "bios" to one of real meaning defined by the unique word "zao". Where "bios" refers to the duration of life, "zao" speaks of an enjoyment of real life, life worthy of its name, full of vigour and meaning.

This life comes as an instant change to the believer upon initial faith in Christ. Jesus spoke of it in terms of new birth: "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." (John 3:3 NIV) and qualified it as a possession: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16 NIV).

However, Jesus also made it very clear that this new "life" was a progressive transformation in quality: "I have come that they may have life (zao), and have it more abundantly." (John 10:10). Paul describes this "real living" in terms of complete absorption in Christ: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain." (Philippians 1:21). This was not a sell-out of reality and turning away from society as a hermit but an expression of the deep and satisfying life of knowing Jesus personally and serving him fully, no matter what vocation is ours.

This distinguished plateau of life for a Christian can be the possession of a joy that goes beyond any circumstance (John 15:11) and a peace that passes all understanding (Philippians 4:6-7). It is truly living out life to its fullest between each step. What is life between steps for you?

(Correction: Last week's column, fourth paragraph should read: "Someone has accurately defined justification as "just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned.")

What is my response:
