

Justification by Faith Alone

Galatians 2:15-21

How many of you have been to Disney world? We took our kids two summers ago... I like fast roller coasters, I'm not crazy about that ride at Bush Gardens in Williamsburg, but they have one I love at Disney: Space Mountain. It is fast. It is full of quick jerks, and it's dark. Our kids loved it. And I love it because it's the only place where you are like allowed to scream non-stop as loud as you want. It's like therapy.

I enjoy the thrill, the quick jerk, the sharp turns, the sudden drops of Space Mountain, but that's not how I want to live my life.

Yet, apart from the gospel, *life is a roller coaster*. The only consistently stabilizing force for my life is the Gospel. My heart would go crazy if it weren't for the Gospel.

- If my joy and peace are based upon how things are going physically, emotionally, relationally, financially, then every day would be space mountain.
- But even when things are good, we need to know where are joy and peace are derived. Jesus reminded the 70 missionaries, after some success, being filled with joy, to redirect it: "Rejoice that your names are in the book of life."
(Luke 10:20)

Everyone's life is centered on something. What's your life centered on?

- Money – if it is, then you're on an emotional roller coaster
- Career – if it goes down the tubes, you're gone
- Hobby – Talent - House

I want to remind you of this basic truth that we've been seeing in Galatians:

We must keep **the Gospel** as the main thing in our lives.

In Gal 2:15-21, we have probably the **most significant section** in the letter. Here Paul **summarizes the gospel**. Also, within the structure of the letter, we have his thesis, **his main point**.

One commentator has said that the phrase “faith in Jesus Christ” (2:15-16) is explained through the rest of the letter.

Indeed, Paul teaches us many life-changing truths related to the gospel in Galatians. One of them is introduced here: **“justification.”** He will give us another word: **“redemption”** in chapter 3, and a third word to describe the glory of God’s salvation: **“adoption”** in ch 4.

What does justification mean?

Justification is the exact opposite of *condemnation*. To ‘condemn’ is to declare someone guilty; to ‘justify’ is to declare him not guilty, innocent or righteous (Stott).

Stott: **“No one has understood Christianity that does not understand this word.”** The verb occurs 3 times in vs 16-17, and as a noun in verse 21 (“righteous”).

Luther (who knew the value of this doctrine, as we will celebrate next week with the Reformation) **said: “It is most necessary that we should know this article well, that we should teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually.”**

2:11-14

This passage comes right after Paul's confrontation of Peter. Peter was not living out the implications of the gospel. Read verse 14... Schreiner says that it is best to see his words going on into verse 21 – all of it addressed to Peter. Others say it stops earlier. The situation is clearly in Paul's mind.

Paul takes a situation where Peter wanted to force Gentiles to keep the law in order to have table fellowship with them, even though he knew that neither Jew nor Gentile could be justified by the law. His failure to accept Gentiles, led Paul to call him a "hypocrite."

The gospel changes everything in our life. As Nate said last week, it should kill things like racism and other attitudes.

I have two points...

1. Justification is by faith in Christ alone (15-16)

Many people find Paul's argument **dull, complicated** or **irrelevant**; but it is none of the above! Far from dull, it should cause us to dance! It's not complicated, as we'll see.

And nothing is more relevant than how to be right before God! All other needs pale in comparison to this need!

Here is the problem & solution:

- God is righteous.
- We are not righteous.
 - Here we find our predicament.
 - We know this through our conscious and we know this through experience. You know that there is friction, tension, we are not at peace with God.
- Only righteous people can have eternal life.

The question is: How can an unrighteous person be righteous

before a holy God? 2 options: Faith alone or works of the law.

“Works of the law” refers to all the works prescribed by the Mosaic law (Scriner, 161). Not just ceremonial law.

The Answer: Faith in Christ Alone (15-16)

Notice: Paul mentions 3 things with repetition to emphasize the answer: (1) “works of the law” (2) “faith in Christ” and (3) to whom this applies.

- A. **Not “justified by works of the law.” (16 – 3X).** Three times he says we are not justified by works of the law.
- **15** – Paul is not saying that he and Peter, “**Jews by birth**” were not sinners, but that they were not sinners in the same way as Gentiles. We know that he is not saying he and Peter were sinless as Jews by the next phrase...
 - **16** – “**yet we know....**” We who are Jews, who were a special people, know that not even they could be right before God with “works of the law.”
 - People in the OT were not saved differently – they were saved by grace alone through faith alone – that’s what chapter 3 is about.
 - Of course, not all Jews believe this – but he and Peter shared this belief. Paul didn’t use to believe it (Gal. 1:13-16)
 - “Well, that pious person kept the OT law really well.”
Yeah, but if we are trying to jump the Grand Canyon, and

someone makes it farther than the other, but neither make it – they are both dead! It's more like we are trying to jump to the moon. If you go a few inches higher, we are still hopeless.

- James: "whoever keeps the law, but fails at one point, is guilty of breaking it all." (2:10)
- Someone had to keep the law. That was Jesus.

The Gospel is not what I can do for God; but what God has done for me.

- Lloyd-Jones – the common answer, "I'm trying." That is the wrong answer if anyone alludes to that. It's done.

Paul called this "seeking to establish their own righteousness" (Rom. 10:3).

A striking Jewish attitude toward the law as means of justification comes from the epitaph of a 1st century tomb:
Here lies Regina She will live again, return to the light again, for she can hope that she will rise to the life promised, as real assurance, to the worthy and the pious in that she has deserved to possess an abode in the hallowed land. This your piety has assured you, this your chaste life, this your love for your people, this your observance to the Law, your devotion to your wedlock, the glory of which was dear to you. For all these deeds your hope for your future is assured. (Ryken, 62)

Do you want to place your hope in eternal life on this? For all your "deeds," your "observance to the Law," your "piety?" No, I say, "my hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness."

Those who believe they can earn righteousness, and go to heaven are:

- **In Bondage – go look at cultures where they are trying to earn salvation and observe their life.**
- **Deceived – where do you get this idea? It's a lie, "It's the biggest lie of the biggest liar ever known. No one has every perfectly kept God's law.**
- **Underestimating God's holiness, and their sinfulness.**
- **Misunderstanding of the purpose of the law: That was never the intent of the law in the first place: the law drives us to Jesus, and Jesus enables then to keep God's law.**

How can a person be righteous? Answer:

- **No Way: By Works of the Law**

Rather:

- **One Way: By Faith in the Son**

B. But "By Faith in Jesus Christ" (16 – 3x)

- **As mentioned, "justify" occurs 3 times as a verb in vs 16-17, and as a noun in verse 21 ("righteousness" or justification). It occurs 8 times in Galatians (see also 2:17; 3:8, 11, 24, 5:4).**
- **"faith in Christ" or "believed" occurs 3 times in verse 16.**

We are justified how, Imago Dei? How are we saved? By faith in the Son – alone.

**"God's verdict of "not guilty" is hidden from the eyes of the world, and believers receive such a promise by faith."
(Schreiner, 155).**

Consider Paul: not "self-atonement." He who killed people never said "I need to pay God back." The Gospel is for the

guilty who cast themselves on God's mercy.

The good news of the gospel is that righteousness **is given, not earned**. It is “gift righteousness.”

A problem with justification is how can a judge be just if he declares rebellious people innocent? Paul answers it in **Galatians 3:13** – Christ took our punishment, upholding God’s just demands. We are justified by a substitute.

On the cross, he died for my law-breaking. All that is required is for me to acknowledge my sin and helplessness and put my whole trust on Jesus Christ to save me.

2 Corinthians 5:21 says we are counted righteous (4:6).

- *The gospel is Imputed Righteousness.*
- *Imputed righteousness is Instantaneous & permanent! God will never reopen the case again.*

When he sees us, he sees us in his Son! We are united to Jesus.

- This causes us to celebrate – freedom
- This should create humility – Rom3:21-27. No boasting

iii. To whom does this apply? Everyone! (3 groups – (1) “a person” (2) “we also believed” (3) “no one”)

Paul puts the answer to humanity in general (“a person”), to his situation personally (“we” – Paul and Peter) and to everyone universally (“no one”).

There are no exceptions. Anyone who is saved is saved by faith in Christ alone. No way, by works of the law, one way, by faith in the Son.

Begg, preparing a sermon for a conference at a coffee shop in Harvard square. He had his Bible open, and a girl from China approached him and asked, "Are you a Christian?" Yes, are you?" he asked. "Yes" she said. "How did you become a Christian?" She said, "I enter through narrow gate." Yes – that's it; we must all enter through one gate, like a turnstall, which leads to this amazing arena, full of people, like Revelation says, "which no one can number from every tribe, language."

This little word is "**alone**" critically important. It is not a mixture of faith plus something. It is faith alone.

Now, Luther said rightly, "**we are saved by faith alone, but the faith that saves is never alone.**" That is, real faith, saving faith will produce the fruit of obedience to God... and that's what #2 is about...

2. Justified people are changed people (17-21)

Paul describes how justification leads to a new life, as he answers an objection, and then illustrates the power of the gospel with his own life (verse 20).

In this we see, that justified people are changed people. That isn't to say *they are perfect* (remember Peter in 2:11-14); but *they are new*. And they need to live out of their new life, not try and revert back to their old life (again, Peter!).

A. **A Question: (Verses 17-19)** These verses have been understood in different ways, but of the two main

interpretations, I'm going to go with the option that is consistent with Paul's other writings in Romans.

The argument from Paul's critics was that:

- "If you are teaching it is by faith alone, then aren't you encourage people to just live how every they want?" What incentive is there to live for God?
- "Isn't this dangerous?" This seems irresponsible.
- Remember Romans, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" Paul's answer in both letters is the same: "God forbid."

Verse 17: He especially denies that this teaching is making Jesus a servant of sin! God is not in the sin business.

Paul assumes responsibility for sin; it's his fault not Jesus' fault.

Verse 18 – He shows the failure in thinking that keeping the law will produce more obedience than justification by faith alone. He says if he wanted to live by the law, not by grace, then all he would do is break the law! That doesn't help you, it only condemns you.

The Jewish leaders were trying to get the Galatians to rebuild the law; but if they would do that, then they would become transgressors all over again. That doesn't help a thing.

Verse 19: "I died to the law" that is, *as a means to salvation*, that "I might live to God." Paul had died to the works righteousness system. He cannot go back. The laws demands were satisfied by the death of Christ.

You see here is **the mistake** of this thinking: you might think that justification by faith is a license to live sinfully, if you fail to understand this one massive truth:

God changes our hearts, not just our status, not just our position before him.

Justification by faith is a change in status. It is a change in position – but it's more than a change in status! It's also involves a new Spirit! See **Galatians 4:6** – new position (“sons of God”), changed person (“Spirit of his Son into our hearts).

B. Illustration: Paul's Life

Does verse 20, look like a description of a person who wants to sin? No! The only true motivator for a life of holiness is the Gospel, not law-keeping. Verses 20-21 gives **us a picture** of one who has been justified before God, who receives a new heart.

We can learn at least **six truths** about being a new person: This is the picture of someone who gets the gospel.

Again, these truths need to be applied.

- Peter's problem was that he was failing to apply this to his life – in his rejection of the Gentiles.
- One writer has said that *sanctification* (growing in Christ-likeness) is "the **art of getting used to our justification.**" Get used to it; get familiar with it.

The way we grow spiritually is to dwell on our new position, and that is possible because God has given us a new heart.

- i. **We have a new union.** “I have been crucified with Christ”

Paul speaks of what John Murray called **the most magnificent of all doctrines "union with Christ."** God attaches us to the events of Christ's life so that they become part of our lives.

Notice how Paul speaks of "death and resurrection." (19-20).

We aren't the same person because the death and resurrection are not only historical events, but events in which we have come to share through our union with him!

Four things were nailed to the cross: (1) Jesus, (2) a sign: "King of the Jews" (3) the debt of our sin (Col. 2:13-14), and the surprise: (4) we were.

Perfect tense – a historical event with present implications.

Leon Morris, "This is for me personally the most moving text in the whole of Scripture."

In Ephesians 2, Paul adds that, not only have we been "crucified with Christ" but also were "made alive together with Christ" "raised up with Christ"

- **"with"** is the prefix *syn* in Greek, like synergy. What God did for Christ, he did at the same time for believers.
- We get words like **"synched"** – synch your big computer with your little phone. We have been synched up with Christ.
- **When Jesus Christ got out of the tomb, 2,000 years ago, Tony Merida got up with him!**

Application:

- **A person who is united to Jesus Christ is never the same person again!** He has become a new creation! It's not as though we can't sin; we can; it's that we don't want to! And we have the power to say no to sin and yes to God.
- My failures are put under the blood of Christ. I am not condemned because of Christ's work.

**My accomplishments do not distinguish me
and my failures do not destroy me.**

- I am "hidden with Christ in God."
- ii. **We have a new identity**, "I know longer live... the life I live"

Which is it? (20b). Paul doesn't mean he doesn't have a personality, but that he lives out of a new position, and identity, with new affection.

- **Augustine – "It is not I" when skanky lady showed up.
When you become a Christian, you get a new I.**

iii. **We have new power**, "Christ who lives in me"

- Col. 1:27, "Christ in you, the hope of glory."

If God put a million dollars in your account every day, but did not give you Christ, you would have nothing. If he you had the greatest body and face in the world, but did not have Christ you would possess nothing.

What is a Christian? One who has been justified by faith in Christ alone. One who has the Spirit: "He who does not have the Spirit of Christ, does not belong to Christ." (Rom. 8:9).

Christianity isn't about signing a card, or taking a class and then "trying to live for Christ." **It is Christ living through you.** It is like saying marriage is about buying a house and putting food on the table. That's what I do in our marriage, but that's not marriage. Marriage is about being united to my wife in love, and out of the overflow of love, I serve – the two have become one.

- It is knowing him, and allowing that Christ life to change you from the inside out.

Our process is **know, grow go**. Our go, our PEACE plan is about **first knowing Christ intimately**, knowing your identity, and then living out of the overflow of that.

How did Paul do so much? *We want to do a lot.* We do it by living out of the overflow of our **new identity** and our **new power**, and we do it knowing we are **not** earning salvation, but as free people who want to serve Christ.

- i. **We have a new way of life**, "live by faith ... Son of God"

All of life for the Christian is *lived by faith*.

Hebrews 12 – by faith, by faith, by faith. Read 12:33-40

See **Galatians 3:2-3**. We keep living by the Spirit, by faith.

We **don't** live by sight. We don't live by lusts. We don't live by greed. We don't live by quest for power or popularity.

- v. **We have a new object of worship**, "who loved me and gave himself for me"

Piper: “Paul was utterly mastered, held captive, by one great scene in history: a cross on Golgotha, and on it, the Son of God who loved us and gave himself for us.”

Are you utterly mastered by this truth?

Don’t miss Paul’s use of the past tense here. It’s not that “Christ loves us” (that’s true) but that he “loved us.” He is going back to a time. The cross is the proof of God’s love.

His affections for you have been put on full display at the cross!

Say it: “the Son of God loved me, Tony. The Son of God gave himself for me, Tony.” I want you to know the specific, personal, particular love of Christ for *you*.

The gospel is how you deal with your idolatry. Idolatry is **overvaluing creating things. *It is seeking for something to give you what only Christ can give you.***

- **Keller, Debbie, down because she wasn’t popular and beautiful to people – “You’ve got forgiveness, adoption, eternal glory; reign w/Christ; “What good is that if I cant’ get a date?” – That’s an idol. That is a functional savior. Seeking for something else to give you what only God can give you.**

You are loved w an everlasting love. An eternal, perfect love.

Your idol says, “serve me or die.” Jesus says “I served you, now die to your idols. “I have given you all your heart ever wanted.””

You see the gospel is not just for getting to heaven; its about

getting heaven into you.

vi. **We have a new love for grace and Christ's cross**

Paul mentions the two foundational truths of our salvation, the grace of God and the cross of Christ.

He is saying **if anyone thinks he can be justified before God by works**, he is denying the two basic truths of Christianity.

- You are “nullifying the grace of God,” because you’re saying it’s by works;
- and you are saying Christ’s finished work is unnecessary or insufficient. (“Christ died for no purpose”).

To trust in yourself and *not* in Christ alone is an **insult** to the grace of God and to the cross of Christ because you deem them both as unnecessary. You are saying I will do "self-atonement."

For the Christian, we claim, **6:14** as our motto...

Chamblin: The Spirit does not take his pupils beyond the cross, but ever more deeply in it.

- If you are Christian, you should never cease meditating on the greatness of the cross and salvation.
- If you are not a Christian, let me encourage you to look to the Savior, and not yourself for salvation.