

JUSTIFICATION: By Works or by Grace? Galatians 2:1-21

Read Galatians 2:1-21

Justification: By Works or by Grace

What does it mean to be justified?

To be justified is to be saved, to be declared “not guilty,” to be delivered from the power and punishment of sin.

But what is sin? Not much preaching on sin today!

Sin is not only the bad things that people do, lie, gossip, cheat, adultery, all of which are indeed sin. But SIN is the state and condition of every person who is not a justified believer in the Lord Jesus Christ!

The opposite of justification is condemnation.

The state of being condemned is not something to be decided “out yonder.”

John 3:35-36

³⁵ The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. ³⁶ He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

Condemned people are saved or justified by believing the Gospel.

Then what is the Gospel?

Christ died for sinners!

Are you a sinner?

Do you believe the Gospel?

Do you need a Saviour?

I make no apology for often repeating this because it gets at the root of the matter.

John the Baptist: The axe is laid to the root of the tree.

Do you really believe that God would be just if He sent you to hell?

Please be honest with yourself and consider that question.

Because if you cannot accept the fact that you are a guilty and condemned sinner then you are still holding on to something that is self-righteousness.

Paul's accusation here in Galatians against Peter is that there is a Saviour who is sufficient to meet the demands of God's Holy Law and he is denying that!

Then what must you do in order to be saved? If you tell some people that salvation is free; that you only believe, and they will argue - No, I must have a part; there must be some act, some human response other than faith that I must perform in order to complete the deal between me and God.

Well, there were Judaizers going about at the time Paul when wrote this letter to the church at Galatia that were troubling the church.

The Judaizers taught that you must believe in Jesus AND you must be circumcised.

Acts 15:1

And certain *men* came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

And today there are legalists who insist that you must do something in addition to faith in Christ in order to be saved! We will come back to this matter later.

First a little background: After 14 years...? [Gal 2:1]

In Galatians Chapter 1, Paul refers to his conversion to Christ; he was on the road to Damascus, with a commission from the Jewish council to arrest and punish Jews who were calling themselves "the Way," i.e., Christians.

Acts 9:1-2

Then Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ² and asked letters from him to the synagogues of Damascus, so that if he found any who were of the Way, whether men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.

But Jesus Christ appeared to Saul...and Saul was changed from a hating Saul of Tarsus to a loving Paul the apostle to the Gentiles.

Acts 9:3-6

³ As he journeyed he came near Damascus, and suddenly a light shone around him from heaven. ⁴ Then he fell to the ground, and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?"

⁵ And he said, "Who are You, Lord?"

Then the Lord said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. It is hard for you to kick against the goads."

⁶ So he, trembling and astonished, said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

Then the Lord *said* to him, "Arise and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

This was about A.D. 34.

Paul spent 3 years in the Arabian Desert being taught by Jesus about the relationship between the Law and the Gospel.

Then Paul goes to Jerusalem. Now it is 14 years later and Paul returns to Jerusalem for the council described in Acts 15.

What was the problem in the church that required such a council?

Judaizers were demanding that Gentiles be circumcised in order to become Christians. They were teaching that a man must become a Jew before he could be qualified to become a genuine Christian.

Is that a problem today? It sure is. You can go a few blocks down the street from here and be taught that you must be baptized in order to be saved. Or, you can drop in on a typical Southern Baptist church and be told that God saves you because you make a decision to allow God to save you. Some groups insist that unless you are a member in good standing of their particular denomination or sect you cannot be saved. **WORKS! WORKS! WORKS!**

Legalism takes many forms but the issue never changes:

One of the prisoners on a Bible Study that I was grading wrote:
"Legalism is a work that is never finished."

Grace or works? Explain very simply: cause/effect.

NOW to Galatians 2:3 Paul says “Look, not even Titus my companion, who is a Greek was required to be circumcised!”

But didn't Paul have Timothy circumcised? Yes, he did.

Acts 16:1-3

Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, *the* son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father *was* Greek. ²He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. ³Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took *him* and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.

Timothy's father was a Greek, and his mother was a Jew, and Paul had Timothy circumcised, but refused to have Titus circumcised. What is the difference?

In the case of Timothy the issue was not to offend the Jews to whom they were preaching, not in order for Timothy to be saved.

In the case of Titus, legalism was the issue, so no, he will not be circumcised!

So the issue is settled once and for all. Salvation is by grace, through faith, nothing added by man. But then something went wrong!

What did Peter do that made it necessary for Paul to confront him face-to-face, publicly, and rebuke him?

Let's quickly review the subject of the council in Acts 15.

Peter, who was in Jerusalem at the council, defended the conversion of the Gentiles apart from Judaism, now plays the hypocrite.

They leave Jerusalem and go to Antioch (Acts 15:30).

And when Peter comes to Antioch, he is afraid of the Judaizers!?
Peter refuses to eat the agape meals with the Gentiles!

Galatians 2:11-14

Even good men make mistakes; so we have Paul rebuking Peter.

1. It was an example in grace for the church in Antioch;
2. It provides doctrinal basis for the letter to Galatia;
3. It is applicable for the entire church in all ages.

What was Peter's reaction? He got mad at Paul and quit the church in a huff?
No, Peter was teachable, the sign of any true believer.

Later, Peter would refer to my "beloved brother Paul." (2 Peter 3:15)

Galatian 2:15-21: What is your choice? Grace or Works?

How can a man be justified before God?
How can a guilty sinner be declared not guilty?

Rules, ceremonies, rituals, externals, fraternal orders?
Self-denial, I've been bad, so I punish myself.
Humanitarianism? E.g. Mother Teresa of Calcutta?

Now I do not know what Mother Teresa believed but I have heard preachers use her as an example of how to be saved by her selfless life.

What could be clearer than Galatians 2:16?

Paul says that justification is either through faith in Christ; or else two things are true:

One: vs. 17 We make Christ a sin-promoter, i.e., if eating, drinking, washing, the externals, matter, then what Christ taught would lead you to sin.
(Matthew 15:1-20).

Two: vs. 18 If I rebuild the ceremonial system, we condemn ourselves in the process. The ceremonial system was either SYMBOLIC or it was the SUBSTANCE itself.

Vs. 19-20 Saul, the Pharisee, died to law-works when he met the living Christ.

Now he lives by the faith of the Son of God Who lives in him.
And so do we if we trust Christ and not empty works.

Vs. 21 Do not frustrate the grace of God. Not that you can from God's side. But you can when you preach that a man must do some act or human response in order to be saved.

Is this too hard? Here is a test. If you have any inkling of an idea that you deserve to be saved, based on who you are, what you have done or not done, then you are not saved!

The substitutionary death of Christ for sinners is either sufficient or it is worthless!

What about you? Have you resisted confessing faith in Christ because you think you don't qualify yet? Not good enough? You will not be able to hold out the next day? Then stop looking to your own strength (works) and trust Christ.

Christ saves sinners!

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Vineland Park Baptist Church
April 21, 2010

Franklin Baptist Church, May 15, 1977
Vineland Park Baptist Church, May 25, 1977
Reformed Heritage Chapel, Oct 23, 1977
Wayside Baptist Church, Jan 06, 1980
Minor Heights First Baptist Church, Mar 05, 1980
Vineland Park Baptist Church, Aug 28, 1985
Vineland Park Baptist Church, Jun 16, 1996
Vineland Park Baptist Church, April 21, 2010

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