

Justification by Christ

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Bible Text: Galatians 2:16-21

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Welcome to the Grace Abounding Broadcast brought to you by the congregation of the Shreveport Grace Church that meets at 2970 Baird Road in Shreveport, Louisiana. My name is Ken Wimer and it is my privilege to bring to you today a message that seeks to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ and his glorious person and finished work of salvation accomplished of sinners at the cross. Please stay tuned.

The men and women of Scripture that God was pleased to save and use for his glory were in no way saints in and of themselves. I believe there is a false notion today that somehow because some of these names appear in Scripture that it was because they were a cut above others. But as we read the Scriptures we know and understand that there is none righteous, no not one. And I know the common practice in religion is to refer to Paul as Saint Paul or to refer to Peter as Saint Peter, but dear friend, I need to tell you very plainly that if Paul was a saint or if Peter was a saint it was only because of the grace of God through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ accomplished at Calvary. And that is true of any that are the Lord's.

You know, that word "saint" in Scripture is not reserved to a select few who have done certain good deeds in their life and so they are made saints. No, those are saints, holy, who have been declared just and holy by a holy God. But on what basis? It is not anything in them, but only through the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is by a righteousness imputed. They have been justified by Christ alone.

Now my text today speaks to this in Galatians chapter two. And I want to read from verse 16 down to verse 21.

We read:

Knowing that a man is not justified [and that word means declared righteous or acquitted from guilt] by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to

the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.¹

You ask, “Well, what brought on this statement here by the apostle Paul to the Galatians?”

Well, if you will read a little earlier in the chapter in Galatians chapter two it was over an incident that occurred between Paul and Peter. Now remember, again, I said that Peter if he was the Lord’s, it was not because of anything in him. And this is evident even after the crucifixion, even after Christ’s resurrection, even after his denial of Christ there on the eve of his crucifixion where when the Lord came out of the judgment hall he looked upon Peter and Peter wept. The Lord brought him to repentance, but here again we find Peter living in hypocrisy because it says in the verses previous that when he was in Antioch Peter would sit down and eat with the Gentiles. He didn’t have a problem with it until the Jews showed up. And then when the Jews showed up, what Peter did was stand up and act like he hadn’t been eating with the Gentiles. He withdrew from them and separated himself.

And that is why Paul when he came and saw what was going on, this hypocrisy in Galatians chapter two and verse 14, he says, “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?”²

In other words, he was acting as if their spirituality depended upon how they behaved, one way with the Gentiles, another way with the Jews. And so Paul uses that example to show that if that were the case none could be saved. That here is his declaration in verse 16, again, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law.”³

In other words, by his observance of the law in any way or his keeping of the law or attempts to keep the law. A man is not justified by the works of the law, but it says here by the faith of Jesus Christ.

Three different times in this passage of Scripture we have that statement, by the faith of Jesus Christ. That is different than the saying by faith in Jesus Christ. There are some who would contend that it is by your faith in Jesus Christ that God justifies you. But, dear friend, what is the difference between saying that and saying you just keep the law? Who has perfect faith in the Lord Jesus Christ? Who has never wavered? Who has seen

¹ Galatians 2:15-21.

² Galatians 2:14.

³ Galatians 2:16.

him plainly and completely without faltering? I certainly can't say that. And I know that you can't.

No, our justification before God, if God has been pleased to save us, it is based upon the faith of Jesus Christ, that faith which is of him. In other words, he obeyed perfectly the law. He submitted perfectly to his Father. He trusted perfectly in God and worked out that perfect righteousness.

So it is by the faith of Jesus Christ.

Another way of reading that would be the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. That is the only basis upon which any sinner is saved, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

There are some things that those that have been taught of God know concerning being justified by Christ alone. And that is the language of Scripture in verse 17 of Galatians two.

We read, "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ..."⁴

That is certainly my hope. I do not seek to be justified by my works. I do not seek to be justified by my so-called service for God. No, my desire is to be justified by Christ alone.

I pray that is your desire.

Now here are some things we know. First of all as it says here in verse 16. We know that it is by Christ alone because we know that no one is justified by the law. That is just the plain statement and language of Scripture.

"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law..."⁵ in other words by the deeds of the law, by his trying to keep the law.

And you say, "Well, why not?"

Well, here is the second reason. We know that we are justified by Christ alone and that is because the law requires perfect obedience. And because it requires perfect obedience, we know that none can be justified by that law. There is no flexibility in the law of God, dear friend. If you have sinned, even in thought...

You say, "Well, I didn't say a bad word."

Well, you thought it. Even in thought, word or deed, you stand condemned before the law of God.

⁴ Galatians 2:17.

⁵ Galatians 2:16.

In Galatians chapter three and verse 10 we read this. “For as many as are of the works of the law...”⁶

Now this is not talking about outward blatant people running in open sin as the world would define it. No, but as man as are of the works of the law, in other words they make the keeping of the law their boast in righteousness and their hope of salvation. Listen to the Scripture. It says they are under the curse.

“For it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.”⁷

And then verse 11 very plainly says, “ But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident: for, The just shall live by faith.”⁸

Now here faith is put in opposition to the law. It is a synonym of grace, but it is also a synonym of Christ. You could very easily substitute the name faith there for Christ.

The just shall live by Christ. He is their justification. All right? So we know that no one is justified by the law. We know this from the law itself that requires perfect obedience. Bu we know this also from the gospel.

In Colossians chapter two and verses nine and 10 we read that we are made complete in Christ. It is not by our works that we are saved. I know some say, “Well up until the point you believe, you are forgiven of those sins, but from there forward, it is up to you now to keep the faith and to complete that salvation.”

No, listen to Colossians chapter two and verses nine and 10.

For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power.⁹

Now that is the declaration of the gospel. If a person has been chosen in Christ, redeemed by Christ, he has been justified by Christ and that calling of the gospel to Christ is aw ay from any works of the flesh and any thought of righteousness in one’s self and looking to Christ alone, justified by Christ alone.

We know that from what the law says. We know what from that gospel says. But let’s be honest here, friend, we also know this from experience. You can speak all you want to, to your own goodness and righteousness, but in your conscience, can you say that that goodness or righteousness is of any merit or value before a holy God? It is tainted with sin. There is none good, no not one.

⁶ Galatians 3:10.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Galatians 3:11.

⁹ Colossians 2:9-10.

Has the Lord brought you by his Spirit to see yourself as you truly are before a holy God as nothing but a wretched sinner? Has he been pleased to show you your lostness, what it is to be lost?

One who is truly lost can't find their way out. That is what it is to truly be lost. You have seen examples on the news of people that were out hiking and were up in the mountains and in a snow storm and became lost and were totally incapable of moving anywhere. They had to wait to be rescued. And their total livelihood or life depended upon someone finding them. That is the case of any sinner.

The Scripture describes those that the Lord saves as lost sheep, ones that the Savior came to seek and to save, that the Savior finds, the Savior takes and puts upon his shoulder and brings back to the fold.

So any that are honest before God know that from their experience justification must be by Christ alone.

We see that in Romans chapter seven and verse 18. This is the testimony of the apostle Paul even after his conversion. He said, "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing."¹⁰

Now, granted, God gives his Spirit to those that he has redeemed by Christ and that Spirit gives them life to look to Christ, gives them eyes to see, gives them ears to hear his voice and follow him. But in their flesh, dwelleth no good thing.

"For to will is present with me."¹¹

That is what Paul said,

"But how to perform that which is good I find not."¹²

So that is the other truth, dear friend, concerning how it is that God can justify sinners.

Now if by God's grace he has so taught you and you are resting in Christ alone, here are some facts of truths also concerning what it is to be justified by Christ alone. In coming back to my text in Galatians chapter two and verses 17 to 21 I want to focus in on four particular realities, if you will, of being justified by Christ alone. And here is the first. And that is if justified by Christ that means we are free from any debt to the law.

Now your conscience would tell you when you sin, well, go back to the law and try to do something to make it right.

Dear friend, there is no mercy with that law. That law can only condemn you for that sin.

¹⁰ Romans 7:18.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

But there is mercy with Christ. And the point that Paul is making even with regard to this incident with Peter is, “Peter, why is it that you believing that you are justified by Christ and yet now you put conditions upon who you eat with and who you don’t and who you walk with and who you don’t as far as making it a condition of spirituality?”

That I what he was doing in essence. Until the Jews showed up he would sit there and eat with those Gentiles in that freedom that he had in Christ. But as soon as a Jew came up, what did he do? He ran back, if you will, to some interpretation of the law that said that they had to keep themselves separate from the Gentiles.

But, dear friend, the truth of the gospel is that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek, bond nor free. And so what Paul is exhorting Peter regarding this is that he was seeking to add his own works to the work of Christ. And his point here is that in verse 17, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.”¹³

If we seek to add our own works to Christ, that would make us ministers of sin. In other words, even the thought of adding a work to the work of Christ is a transgression of the law. And to go back to law preaching and resting in my own works for justification or sanctification, is to live as an unjustified sinner would live and a transgressor.

And that is why Paul said there in verse 18, “For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”¹⁴

What is he talking about? Well, he is talking about going back to the things of the law that were put away by Christ’s death and endeavoring to build a spiritual life based on those things that you couldn’t do anyway and that required Christ dying. So why go back to them?

No, dear friend, if we are justified by Christ alone, that means we are free from any debt to the law. In other words, we are only bound to Christ alone and to his grace and to that work that he accomplished there at Calvary.

But, secondly, being justified by Christ alone not only are we free from any debt to the law, but we live unto God.

Paul said in verse 19, “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”¹⁵

What does he mean to be dead to the law? What he is talking about is being dead to its demands and its penalties. It doesn’t mean to be lawless, but to be dead to its demands and penalties. Why? Because if Christ died that means we have been justified. When he

¹³ Galatians 2:17.

¹⁴ Galatians 2:18.

¹⁵ Galatians 2:19.

died he put away all of the curse of the law on behalf of his people. And when he rose again, that was the evidence that, indeed, he accomplished all that was necessary.

In Romans chapter six in verse seven it says, “For he that is dead is freed from sin.”¹⁶

That word “freed” means justified. Now it doesn’t mean that if Christ died for me I no longer sin, but freed from sin, in other words, its penalty, its curse. Because Christ has borne it away. And so what does there remain then but life? If Christ has fulfilled the law on behalf of sinners, then that law has been satisfied and justice satisfied demands life. It would be just like in any court case. If the law has been satisfied the prisoner goes free. And so that is what Paul is speaking of here to be alive unto God.

All are pardon, all of our righteousness, all of our acceptance, all of our life comes through Christ. And living unto God means to be alive by his Spirit and through his grace and desiring to please him in all things. Living unto God is the evidence that I have been justified by Christ. And those who are made alive by the Spirit of God certainly desire to glorify him in all things. They don’t desire to live in sin, but consider themselves not under obligation to that law which could never show mercy, but to Christ and his love.

Is that your hope, dear friend? So being justified by Christ we are free from any debt to the law. Secondly, we are alive unto God. But, thirdly, it says we have been crucified with Christ.

We see Paul using this language.

“I am crucified with Christ.”¹⁷

What does that mean? Does that mean that we go and nail ourselves to a cross every day or afflict ourselves in some way in order to continue to maintain God’s favor?

No. Even that thought would put you back under the law, under works. But when Paul said, “I am crucified,” in the original it is literally, “I have been crucified with Christ.”

In other words, representatively in Christ my representative, when he died, I died.

The Old Testament high priest when he went into the holiest of holies there on the Day of Atonement, it wasn’t everybody running in and out of that holy of holies. It was the high priest and he went in bearing the names of the people on his breastplate.

In other words, it was by his doing and dying.

And so, dear friend, it is for any that are saved, it is because of Christ doing and dying that we are justified before God.

¹⁶ Romans 6:7.

¹⁷ Galatians 2:20.

And Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ representatively."

But also experientially. He says here, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."¹⁸

Now very simply my justification took place at the cross. That simply means that when Christ died he took all of my sin. At that particular time when Christ died all my sin would have been future sin even the sin that I have not yet committed. And yet foreseeing me as that sinner and being chosen in Christ, when Christ died God took that sin and put it to Christ's account. That is why he put him to death. He crucified him.

And yet at the same time the Scriptures say that that very righteous obedience of Christ is taken and put to my account as a sinner and that is my justification, that two fold transaction, the sin put to Christ at the cross and his righteous obedience put to the account of the sinner. That took place at the cross.

But those for whom Christ died must be brought to life. And so that is what Paul is describing here where he says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live."¹⁹ In other words, his death demanded my life.

"Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."²⁰

That newness of life that is given to one of God's children when they are born again by the Spirit of God is attributed to Christ.

"Yet, not I, but Christ liveth in me."²¹

You see, faith's object is Christ for all things, for pardon, for righteousness, for peace, for joy and for every supply of every grace. There is nothing in which you can boast, dear friend, nor I. It is all Christ.

But then the final fourth point that I would have you to see is being justified by Christ alone, that means that the sinner is fully and completely forgiven and made righteous fully, freely, completely made righteous.

As we come to the end of this portion of Scripture Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."²²

You see, there he is giving all the glory to Christ. And he says, "Who loved me and gave himself for me."²³

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Ibid.

²³ Ibid.

So he says, "I do not frustrate the grace of God [confuse it or confound it is that means]: for if righteousness come by the law,"²⁴ any law, if righteousness depends on any obedience of my own, listen, "Then Christ is dead in vain."²⁵

Do you see how serious a matter this is? To say that in any way God looks on anything in you or done by you to declare you righteous, what you are saying is then Christ is dead in vain.

Why? Because you are saying that you could have accomplished that righteousness without him dying. And there is nothing more blasphemous than to even think that.

No, being justified by Christ alone means that we are fully, freely and completely saved by Christ alone. That is what it means. If obedience to the law is necessary to be justified before God, then all that Christ did is in vain. Any law.

I know today in religion people make a law of free will. You hear preachers state that, that God is waiting for you to decide. So in other words, that is a law. That is a rule for God to declare you righteous. But if you make free will to be the basis of God declaring you righteous, then Christ is dead in vain.

Or faith. Put faith in there. You say, "Well, at least it requires believing. Even if faith comes from God. It still requires believing."

Well, now you have made a law of faith. So if righteousness come by the law of faith then Christ is dead in vain. You can't get around this clear statement of Scripture.

You say, "Well, it is by my personal obedience."

Well, put that in that statement. If righteousness come by your personal obedience then Christ is dead in vain.

Any other condition, dear friend, other than Christ alone makes the death of Christ to be of none effect.

No, dear friend, I pray that the Lord would teach you even as he has been pleased to teach me and any that are his that to be justified before a holy God is by Christ alone.

And what is the reason for it? Again, coming back to Galatians chapter two and verse 20, "Who loved me."

There is the reason why God justifies, because he has set his love upon sinners and that from eternity. Purposed to save them even before time from eternity God purposed to save a people and gave them to his Son because he loved them and that is why it says,

²⁴ Galatians 2:21.

²⁵ Ibid.

“And gave himself for me,” purposing in eternity to do it is not our justification. It was purposed in eternity, yes, but Christ had to give himself. What that means is lay down his life in order for God to be just and to justify sinners.

The truth there is summed up in two words, substitution. In other words, it took Christ dying in my place and satisfaction. It took Christ satisfying a holy God that he might be just and justifying sinners.

Is this your confession? Is this your testimony? Is this your hope? I pray so.

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