

Galatians 2: 17-19; “Justification, Sought and Found”, Message # 11 in the series – “Christ Has Made Us Free”, A Bible Study Conducted by Pastor Paul Rendall, on July 24th, 2013, at the church.

The phrase, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ” might seem confusing to some as it would seem to imply that a person might seek in vain; or that the person who comes to Jesus might be refused and turned away from receiving the free gift of salvation. But this is never the case, for the sincere seeker. Jesus says in John 6: 37 – “All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out.” The phrase should rather be understood this way: If even we Jews who have come to Christ, have come to acknowledge our need to be justified by Christ alone, and we still fall into the sinful error of pursuing justification as though there was something to be added to Christ’s finished work, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Is He going to accept those errors and work together with those persons who think that way, to help forward a false gospel, and a false cause? No, He is certainly not, is Paul’s answer. Paul is saying, the problem is not with Christ as a minister. No, the problem is with the person who goes back to the law to attempt to justify themselves in the sight of God. Christ is never a minister of sin, but every Christian needs to understand that even we who believe may be blind to the greatness of the work of redemption that Christ has done in His life and death and resurrection. Even Peter was blind to this for a time, but he didn’t stay in that fatal spiritual condition. Let us understand that, for all believers, Christ came and dealt entirely and thoroughly with our relationship to the law, so that it would be completely fulfilled on our behalf, whether we are Jews or Gentiles. So therefore, your having been justified in the sight of God will be shown forth in the three ways mentioned here by the Apostle Paul. 1st – Justification is truly sought and found by faith in Christ alone. 2nd – Justification is not truly sought, or found, if you build what you once destroyed. And 3rd – Justification has been truly found and sanctification will surely become a reality if you know that you have died to the law and are living to God.

1st of all – Justification is truly sought and found by faith in Christ alone.

Verse 17 says, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin?” Certainly not!” Seeking to be justified by Christ, all sinners, both Jew and Gentile, must come to Him by faith and not by their works. Part of the problem here, for the Jews was that many of them did not consider themselves to be great sinners in the sight of God. Therefore, it would be much easier for them to think that some ceremonial or moral works should, or even must, be added to Christ’s work in order to be saved. Look back at verses 14 and 15. “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, ‘If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?’ “We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles.” Now, you can see the problem here can’t you? The Jews of that day thought that by their privileges of having the law and the whole sacrificial and ceremonial system of worship, that they were God’s true people by their natural birth and their ethnic identity. They were Jews and not sinners of the Gentiles. This, for them, obviously meant that they were not open idolaters. But it was more than that. They went regularly to the temple and to synagogue and they engaged in all that was required of them ceremonially; they were outwardly moral people, and this is what made them think that they were not sinners in the same sense as the Gentiles. They were seekers of God through these God ordained religious means. And because they sought God in this way of their religious works, they thought that they had found true salvation. They thought themselves very good people. They thought that they were in the category of the righteous. They thought, that because they were involved in doing

these good outwardly religious things, it was the means of their justification. But what does Paul say in verse 16? “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law.”

Actually the problem of their sin went much deeper in themselves than they thought. Turn back with me to Romans 3, verse 9. “What then?” “Are we (that is we Jews) better than they?” “Not at all.” “For we have previously charged both Jews and Greeks that they are all under sin.” “As it is written: ‘There is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God.’” “They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none who does good, no, not one.” You can see here that although the Jews were outwardly seeking God in the way of His ordinances, by their religious observances of His ceremonial and moral law, they were not seeking Him in the way that He was insisting upon. They were not doing it by faith in God’s promise of Christ. They were doing all of their seeking to establish their own righteousness. But they were not attaining to a perfect righteousness, that is to their being justified by their works, through these legal observances. The righteousness of their own works was the righteousness of the Law. Look at verse 21. “But now the righteousness of God apart from the law is revealed, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God, through faith in Jesus Christ, to all and on all who believe.” “For there is no difference; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.”

You can see here that all men have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, not just some. And all those who are saved are all saved in the same way; through the perfect righteousness of God displayed in the life and death of Jesus Christ. In Christ’s life, He kept the whole law of God perfectly, and in His death He suffered not for Himself, but for those who see and understand and know themselves to be sinners, whether Jews or Gentiles. It is on this basis that God can be just and the justifier of those Old Testament Jews who believed in Jesus. He passed over the sins previously committed by them under the Old dispensation, punishing their sins in Christ when He came. None of their good works ever came into consideration in regard to their salvation. Now let’s read verses 27-31 of Romans 3. “Where is boasting then?” “It is excluded.” “By what law?” “Of works?” “No, but by the law of faith.” “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.” “Or is He the God of the Jews only?” “Or is He not also the God of the Gentiles?” “Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is only one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.” “Do we make void the law through faith?” “Certainly not!” On the contrary, we establish the law.” Faith in Christ is now the “law” which one is saved by. It is what God requires in order to your being justified; simply to believe in what Jesus has done on behalf of sinners.

Now, 2ndly - Justification is not truly sought, or found, if you build what you once destroyed.

Verse 18 – “For if I build again what I once destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.” This “building again” of what the person who says that they have believed, was supposed to have destroyed when they came to faith in Jesus. It is the deliberate action which is actually taken in every case, by the person who is truly coming to Christ. He destroys the idea in his thinking that he should, or can, add anything to what Christ has done, in order to merit any part of his salvation. Paul puts in the first person – “I”. If I rebuild the idea that I need to obey any aspect of the law in order to be justified, I make myself a transgressor of God’s stated purpose and will,

that I would believe in Jesus Christ alone for my justification. Each of us needs to ask ourselves whether we have thought this way, or maybe still do think this way. The law as a means of justification ought to be altogether destroyed in the thinking of every Christian. Not only can it not justify, but it can rather only do what its office is appointed of God to do, which is to tell us what sin is and to condemn us for not doing it. Turn with me over to 1 Timothy Chapter 1, verse 8. “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” The reason that the law is not made for a righteous man is not because it is not holy, righteous, and good. But it is rather because the righteous man knows that he could never have been saved or justified by the law. He knows himself to fall far short of keeping it in so many ways. The just man knows the law’s purpose and he respects it, and uses the law rightly; to bring conviction of sin to those who need it; himself included, when he falls into a spiritual stupor and forgets what Jesus has died to bring to Him; life and light and grace and peace of conscience. It is a transgression when we rebuild what we once destroyed in our conversion to Christ. If we somehow get the impression that our good works or our church going or our Bible reading or any other good thing that we do is the basis of God’s acceptance of us, we are in great spiritual danger.

Listen to Martin Luther on this: “I myself was once entangled with this error: I thought Christ to be a judge (although I confessed with my mouth, that he suffered and died for man’s redemption) and ought to be pacified by the observation of my rule and order.” “Therefore when I prayed or said Mass, I used to add this in the end: ‘O Lord Jesus, I come unto thee, and I pray thee that these burdens and this straightness of my rule and religion may be a full recompense for all my sins.’” (In other words, because he had imposed upon himself all this strictness of his being a monk, he ought to be forgiven of his sins and justified in the sight of God) He goes on to speak of what happened to him: “But now I give thanks unto God the Father of all mercies, which hath called me out of darkness unto the light of his glorious Gospel, and hath given unto me plentiful knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord; for whose sake I esteem them but as dung, that I may gain Christ, and that I may be found in him, not having mine own righteousness out of the rule of Augustine (the Augustinian order he belonged to), but that righteousness which cometh by faith in Christ; unto whom, with the Father and the Holy Ghost, be praise and glory world without end.” “Amen.” That is the difference, my dear friends, between a person who thinks that they are being saved by their works, and a person who has come to know that they are saved only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Then 3rd – Justification has been truly found, and sanctification will become a reality if you know that you have died to the law and are living to God.

Verse 19 – “For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.” Paul says here that he died to the law through the law. He means that through Christ’s having fulfilled the law personally for Him, as a believer in Christ, means that he could die to its claims of perfection upon him personally. Turn with me over Romans Chapter 7, verse 1. “Or do you not know, brethren (for I speak to those who know the law), that the law has dominion over a man as long as he lives?” “For the woman who has a husband is bound by the law to her husband as long as he lives.” “But if the husband dies, she is released from the law of her husband.” “So then, if while her husband lives, she marries another man, she will be called an adulteress; but if her husband dies, she is free from that law, so that she is no adulteress, though she has married another man.” “Therefore, my brethren, you also have become dead to the law through the body of Christ, that you may be married to another—to Him who was raised from the dead, that we

should bear fruit to God.” A person cannot really live unto God and bear fruit unto God until he becomes free from the claims and demands for perfect obedience which come to them from God’s holy law. Before a person comes to Christ, they are under the law. They are married to the law, because God has not lost His right to command, even though they have lost the power to obey God’s commands perfectly, through Adam’s having broken the covenant of works. The curse of the law is upon every unbelieving man and woman living. And the only way that this awful relationship can righteously come to an end is through someone’s death. We would die to the law’s demands if we could, but we cannot die to them, of our own will and volition. But we can die to them by the dead body of Christ on the cross. When we believe in Jesus, we die to the law’s power to command perfection from us, because the law is satisfied with the perfect obedience of Christ. When in anything we fall short of perfection, or fail to do that which the law requires, Christ makes up for our lack of perfection by His perfect obedience and also has born the punishment due our sins in His own body on the tree. Therefore, having died to the law we can live unto God without fear of condemnation. And we can bear fruit unto God in holiness and righteousness; we can really live to Him, because Jesus has paid for these blessings by His purchasing them with His blood. These blessings will most surely be given to all of God’s Elect people. Let’s close by thinking about Romans 8: 31 and 32 – “What then shall we say to these things?” “If God is for us, who can be against us?” “He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?”