

**Galatians 2: 17-19; “Justification, Sought and Found”, Message # 11 in the series –  
“Christ Has Made Us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall, on  
August 30<sup>th</sup>, 2020, in the Afternoon Worship Service.**

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. 1<sup>st</sup> – Justification is truly sought and found by faith in Christ alone. 2<sup>nd</sup> – Justification is not truly sought, or found, if you build what you once destroyed. And 3<sup>rd</sup> – 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.

**1<sup>st</sup> of all – Justification is truly sought and found by faith in Christ alone.**

The phrase in verse 17, “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 not saying that the problem is with Christ as a minister. He is saying that 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 implications of the work of redemption which Christ has done in His life, death, and resurrection. Even Peter was blind to this for a time, in his relationships with Gentile Christians, but Paul reproved him for it, and corrected him on it. Seeking to be justified by Christ, all sinners, both Jew and Gentile, must both come to Christ 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 then had concluded that it was by this means 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, that is, by their observing the ordinances of His ceremonial and moral law, they were still 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 by this means; that is to their being justified by their works, through these legal observances. The righteousness of their doing these works was the righteousness of the Law. The righteousness which comes by faith in Christ is different. It is a morally perfect righteousness. Indeed it is more than that. It is the fulfillment by Christ of all of God’s holy law from the best and highest of motives; love to God and love to man.

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 from this verse that all men have sinned and fall short of God’s glory, not just some. And so all people who are going to be saved are all saved in the same way; that is, 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, and He punished their sins in Christ when He came. Righteousness was imputed to them then, based on their faith in the Christ who would come later, and who would actually paid the ransom price for their redemption, later. 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.” So 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 you, the sinner.

**2<sup>nd</sup> – Justification is not truly sought, or found, if you build what you once destroyed.**

Verse 18 says – “For if I build again what I once destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.” This “building again” is your going back on your profession of faith in Christ, by your continuing to build once again something which you had previously destroyed. But what is it that this person who is being described, once destroyed, when they came to Christ? It was their trusting in the doctrine of work-righteousness; the thought that you can by your own righteous works please God or find acceptance with God. When you came to Christ, you renounced your own self-righteousness as the means of finding favor with God. When you came to Christ by faith, you destroyed the idea of thinking that you could add anything to what Christ has done, in order to merit any part of His salvation. Paul puts it in the first person – “I”. He is saying – 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. His will is, that I would believe in Jesus Christ alone for my justification.

So, each of us needs to ask ourselves whether we have thought this way, or maybe we still 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 only ultimately do what its office was appointed by 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<sup>st</sup> Timothy Chapter 1, verses 8-11. “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 trying to keep the law. He knows that he falls far short of keeping it in so many ways. The just man knows the law’s purpose, and he respects that purpose, and he uses the law rightly; to bring conviction of sin to himself when he needs it, when he falls into a spiritual stupor and he 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 have 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 then 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.” You see, that is the difference 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 3<sup>rd</sup> – Sanctification will become a reality, if you know that you have died to the law and you 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 absolute strict perfection, from 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.”

So we see from these verses that a person cannot really live unto God and bear fruit unto God until they 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 under the law. They are married to the law. Just because we are a sinner, God has not lost His right to command us to obey Him, even though we 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 has been satisfied by the perfect obedience of Christ. When in anything we fall short of perfection, or we fail to do that which the law requires, Christ makes up for our lack of perfection in our obedience by imputing the merits of His perfect obedience to whatever part of our obedience is falling short of the perfection that God requires. Christ as our Advocate with the Father, and Intercessor for His people, has also has born the punishment due to all of our sins in His own body on the tree. We are justified by faith in Christ, and we stand complete and accepted before God because of the merits of His life death and resurrection being applied to our mind and heart and actions continually after we are saved.

Thus having died to the law we can live unto God without fear of condemnation. And because the law does not condemn us any longer, we can confidently go about to keep His commandments. We know that we will not keep them perfectly, but we love them all, and we can still go on to bear fruit unto God in holiness and righteousness. We can really live to God, because Jesus has paid for all of these blessings that He bestows; wisdom, grace, mercy, and peace in relation to keeping the commandments of God. He bestows His grace on us freely. He purchased these blessings for us at the cost of His precious blood, and He is now applying them to our life.

These blessings are most surely and certainly conveyed all of God’s Elect people. So, let’s close now by thinking about Romans 8: 31-34 – “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?” “Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect?” “It is God who justifies.” “Who is he who condemns?” “It is Christ who died, and furthermore is risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us.” And nothing shall ever separate us from the love of Christ.

