

## Justification (Part 2) – Gal 2:15-21

Gal 2:15-21; This is one of those times in my life that if I could be in two places at one time, I would; This is the first Sunday in the new building at our West Campus . . . And I have to believe that the praise is rising and the joy overflowing  
What a blessing; And what a testimony to God's goodness (David & Kristen Wisen)

- That said, we're in the midst of a mini-series, talking about one of the most important and contentious issues in the history of the church  
One that felt like an earthquake in Paul's day, and a bombshell in Luther's  
A doctrine that's sometimes ignored and often twisted; Even in our day  
And yet it's central to our life and eternity

I'm talking of course, about *justification*; And this text is one of clearest in the Bible, to address it; So let's get at it and see what God has for us

- [15] *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners* [Paul says to Peter];  
[16] *yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*  
Just in case you missed it – it's about justification

And we found last week, that . . .

### 1. Justified means declared and considered righteous

As in blameless; Pure; Equal to God's standard of holiness  
A word used quite often in the NT with a range of meanings  
But when speaking of our salvation, it means declared and considered righteous  
Reckoned so; Counted as such

What it doesn't mean, is *made* righteous

- It doesn't make us righteous

The first of 5 descriptors we highlighted

To say otherwise, to say that justification *makes* us righteous, would be . . .

Contrary to its definition, contrary to how the Bible *uses* it, and contrary to our experience of *sinning* in life

All of which undermines the assurance of our salvation

2<sup>nd</sup>, we found that . . .

- It's a gift of God's grace

Starting with an un-coerced act of God's will to *choose* us for such a declaration, and then an act of God's *favor* to bless us with it

Giving us a standing before him that we don't *deserve*, and can't be bought

B/c it's a gift; Freely given and freely received

3<sup>rd</sup> . . .

- It relieves our guilt

When God justifies us, he no longer holds our sins *against* us, and no longer expects payment *from* us; In his eyes, it's just as if we'd never sinned

4<sup>th</sup> . . .

- It's comprehensive and final

Comprehensive, in that it covers the sin of our past, the sin of our present, and the sin of our *future*; Just as if we'd never sinned, and just as if we never will  
And, it's final; Sealed by the Spirit and guaranteed by the cross

And then last, we found that . . .

- It's the opposite of condemnation

Which is a judgment of guilt that deserves punishment

A state into which we're all born, and a future from which those in Christ are saved

Bringing into sharp relief the meaning of justification, and the massive *blessing* it is

- That was last week, and principle #1

Foundational, if we're going to appreciate what Paul says here in *Galatians*

2<sup>nd</sup>, and *also* foundational, is that . . .

### 2. We desperately need to be justified

None of this makes any sense, or will have any bearing on your life, if you don't first understand your desperate *need* for righteousness

IOW the good news of justification isn't all that great, if the bad news isn't all that bad

And when it comes to our sin, and our lives, and our future – the bad news is pretty bad

As bad as it gets

Starting with the fact that . . .

- We are sinful and unrighteous

We desperately need to be justified, b/c we're sinful, we sin, and we're sinners

Which makes us unrighteous through and through

Like Rom 3:10 says it explicitly – *None is righteous, no, not one*; Quoting Ps 14 and Ps 53

And David says to God in Ps 143 – *No one living is righteous before you* (v2b)

And then there's all the *examples* of such in Scripture; We're sinful

- And, we *sin*; *All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* it says (Rom 3:23)  
Meaning that every man, woman, and child has done wrong in God's eyes, and falls short of his standard of righteousness and holiness; That too is clear  
As if we needed any more evidence than our own *lives*; We sin

- Which makes us, sinners; Apart from Christ, we're sinful, we sin, and we're sinners

**Rom 5:19** – *By the one man's disobedience* [referring to *Adam's* sin] *the many* [us] *were made sinners*

Just as we inherited Adam's *physical* features, we inherited his spiritual ones

Namely, his sinfulness; Or sin *nature*; Something Eph 2 describes in detail (v1-3)\*\*\*\*\*

So no matter how you look at it, we are unrighteous through and through

And it separates us; Horizontally in our *earthly* relationships, and vertically in our *heavenly* one

- Our sin separates us from God

Not as saints who are *in* Christ, but as sinners apart from Christ

It creates a barrier higher than the highest wall, and wider than the widest canyon

Like the *great chasm* between heaven and hell in the parable of the rich man and

Lazarus (Lk 16:19-31); Remember that?

Where the rich man in hell, asks God to send Abraham with a drop of cool water b/c he was in anguish?

And God basically said, I can't and won't; Not only b/c there are *consequences* for your sin, but there's a great *chasm* that's fixed between us; Sin separates

- But it's not just for later, on a cosmic scale, it's for now, on a personal one  
Like it says in **Is 59:1-2** – *Behold, the LORD's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save, or his ear dull, that it cannot hear; [2] but your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you so that he does not hear.*  
He refuses to hear; B/c he's repulsed and *repelled* by our sin

Like a wife who will no longer listen to a husband who's cheating on her  
There's a separation; A barrier

- How much more when the infidelity is between us and *God*? When the offense is between us and him? Like it always is  
*Against you and you only have I sinned* David says to God (Ps 51:4)\*\*\*\*\*

How much *more* is there a separation when we're in the depths of our sin and sinfulness, as unrepentant *sinners*?  
Way more; Magnifying our need and desperation to be *justified* all the more

And the kicker, is that we can't do it ourselves

- **We can't justify ourselves**

We can't *be* righteous, and we can't *declare* ourselves righteous; Not truly so

It's like Paul said when he was defending his integrity in **1 Cor 4:4**

*For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.*

It's the *Lord* who pronounces us righteous; It's the *Lord* who lifts our guilt  
What *we* think, what *we* do, what *we* say – matters *not one bit*

- And thank God for that, b/c that means the opposite is *also* true  
That when we've stumbled in sin and think we're worms; Feeling dirty all over and disgusted by our very flesh – God doesn't; He doesn't see us that way  
He doesn't think of us that way; By virtue of our faith in his Son, he sees us righteous  
Rendering *our* view of ourselves, our feelings of guilt, our mindset – moot and inconsequential

Oh that we would see ourselves God's way and not ours

First as unsaved sinners who need his grace, and then as justified saints who already have it

- We can't *condemn* ourselves as children of light, and we can't *justify* ourselves as slaves of darkness  
Like Solomon said in **Prov 20:9** – *Who can say, "I have made my heart pure; I am clean from my sin"?* It's a rhetorical question to say – "Nobody!"  
Nobody can justify themselves  
Which heightens our desperation to *be* justified, all the more\*\*\*\*\*

That's the 2<sup>nd</sup> principle, foundational to understanding, and appreciating, and applying what Paul says here in Galatians

The 3<sup>rd</sup>, from v16 in the text, is that . . .

### **3. Good works won't cut it (v16)**

We desperately need *God's* declaration of righteousness, b/c good works won't do it  
Works, referring to anything of a tangible nature, that we do; That's a *work* in the Bible  
Like getting circumcised; The work that was being advocated in Galatia  
Or withdrawing from the Gentiles while eating with them; The tangible thing Peter did  
If it involves lifting a finger, it's a work; If it doesn't, it's not

Which rules out faith, belief, and even confessing Jesus as Lord with your *mouth* – an *expression* of your belief  
By definition, good works in the Bible, are *tangible things we do*

- And Paul says, ever so explicitly here, that such things don't and won't cut it, when it comes to our justification  
*[15] We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; [16] yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.*  
3 times in 1 verse, Paul says it's not by *works of the law* that we are justified

So good works, first of all, include . . .

- **Works of the Law**

Referring to things God commanded in the *Old Testament*, in order to be right with him;  
In order to be in his presence, live his way, and receive his grace; His blessing  
Especially the blessing of righteousness; Justification  
Works of the Law don't cut it; Even if we could keep them

It's true now, and it was even true then; Under the *Old Covenant*

That's why Paul says in Rom 9 that the Israel of old failed to *attain* righteousness  
*Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works.* (Rom 9:32)  
So no matter how you slice it, then *or* now, works of the Law won't cut it

- And though Paul's plenty explicit about it in v16; And it would stand alone just *fine* for our life, and doctrine, and faith . . .  
He gives us 2 *reasons* for it in v18 and 19; 2 reasons that works of the law don't cut it

The first of which, is . . .

### **1. Because the Law leads to condemnation (v18)**

Look at v17-19; After just saying that no one is justified *by works of the law*

He says in v17 – *But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! [18] For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. [19] For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.*

It's like he's anticipating some objections to what he just said in v16, and responds accordingly

With v17 supporting the fact that we are justified by *faith*, which we'll get to *next* week, and v18-19 supporting the fact that works of the law won't cut it

*For if I rebuild what I tore down* [Paul says in v18], *I prove myself to be a transgressor*.  
He's referring to the law; The very thing he's just been talking about  
To say that if he goes *back* to it, if he returns to *living* under the law, the very thing he tore down and *repudiated* as a means of justification . . .  
It would only show that he's a sinner, a transgressor; Someone deserving *condemnation* instead of justification  
That's reason #1 works of the law won't cut it

2<sup>nd</sup>, from v19, is . . .

## 2. Because the Law has no sway over us (v19)

As believers, we're not *subject* to the Law; Just like Paul; Who said in v19 . . .  
[19] *For through the law I died to the law*  
He's been released from its commands as a means of justification; That's what he's saying; It no longer holds sway over him

And the same is true of you and I; When we embraced Jesus, we *died* to the Law; We were released from its particulars and consequences  
It no longer holds any *bearing* over our lives in that sense  
As a pattern for godly living, yes; But not a means of righteousness; It holds no sway

➤ But it *does* help us in that respect; It *helps* us be released Paul says  
[19] *For through the law I died to the law*; Through it

How so? By revealing our inability to keep it, and our futility in trying  
So that we throw up our hands and say, "No more! I'm done. I need help"  
And thereby leads us to Jesus; The *perfect* law-keeper  
Who did *for* us, what we can't do ourselves

That's what it means to die *to* the law, *through* the law

➤ All for the purpose of living for God  
*Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God*.  
I might *live*, for him; To the praise of *his* glory; To the praise of *his* grace; To the praise of *his* purposes (**Summary**)

The Law may not lead us to *justification*, but it sure does make us desperate for it  
And passionate to *live* for the one who does it; The one who declares it

2 reasons that we're not justified *by works of the law*

➤ Nor are we justified by . . .

### • **Good works in general**

It's not just *works of the Law* that won't cut it; Good works in *general* won't lead to justification; **Eph 2:8-10**

Paul spends 7 verses to say that God made us alive together with Christ, even when we were dead in our trespasses (Eph 2:5); And then summarizes it with this

[8] *For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing*  
[this saving]; *it is the gift of God*, [9] *not a result of works, so that no one may boast*.  
[10] *For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus* [i.e. saved] *for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them*.  
That we should do them

We're not saved, we're not justified, as a *result* of our good works – good things we do in general; Whether for the cause of Christ or otherwise (2 Tim 1:9; Titus 3:5)  
It's *not a result of works*; We're saved *for* good works, not *by* good works\*\*\*\*\*

➤ Which means that going to church, taking communion, getting baptized, reading your Bible, giving to charity, or anything else of a tangible nature in our day . . .  
*Will not cut it* when it comes to your justification  
You can't buy, earn, gain, or keep your righteous standing before God; Not in whole, and not even in part

Those things are necessary for our *sanctification* – becoming more and more like Jesus *experientially* . . .

But they're *not* a part of our justification – being considered *righteous* like Jesus, positionally

Good works *show* you're justified, they don't *make* you justified  
*Because by works of the law* [yours, God's, or anyone else's] *no one will be justified*.  
They won't cut it