

Justification (Part 3) – Gal 2:15-21

Gal 2:15-21; We're at the tail end of a mini-series about one of the most important and precious doctrines in all the Bible – Justification
And this passage speaks to it as much as any other

➤ [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.*
[17] *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.* [20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* [21] *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*

We found in Parts 1&2, that . . .

1. Justified means declared and considered righteous
2. We desperately need to be justified
3. Good works won't cut it (v16,18-19)

Which brings us to Part 3, and principle . . .

4. It's only through faith in Jesus that we're justified (v16)

V16 – *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*
2 times in 1 verse Paul says that it's by *faith* we are justified
By *faith* we are declared and considered righteous in God's eyes

Defined in **Heb 11:1** as – [*Now faith is*] *the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

As in the assurance of God's justification, and the conviction that it's real; Even though we can't see it; That's faith

➤ And when Paul says that we are *justified* by it – *through* faith and *by* faith . . .
He doesn't mean that our faith somehow makes it *happen*; Or that *we* somehow bring it about; Rather, it's a way of saying that our faith is the means of *receiving* it
The means of *receiving* our justification

It would be like receiving a lottery check that you just won, having found a ticket on the street that somebody else bought
All *you* do is open your bank account and receive the funds
Just like all *you* do in justification, is open your heart and receive his righteousness

We're justified by *faith*, in that faith is the means of receiving it*****

➤ But that still begs the question, what faith in *Jesus* means; B/c it's not just faith *itself* that justifies; That nebulous sort of thing that's *culturally* popular these days
It's faith in *Jesus Christ* Paul says; Meaning what?

3 things; First, from the passage at hand, it's . . .

• Believing in who he is and what he's done

V16b – *We also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ*
Indicating (A) That belief and faith are *different* as Paul uses them here
And (B) That belief is a *part* of faith; A prerequisite of faith
We [believe] in *Christ Jesus*, in order to be justified by faith in Christ; It's prerequisite

And conveys the idea of accepting something as true and real
Like a news story you hear; You either believe it or you don't
Or a rumor; Or somebody's legal testimony
If you *believe* it, you accept it at face value

And the same is true of believing in *Jesus*

If you have faith in *him*, you believe that he's God in the flesh; Or as the Bible says it –
the *Son* of God; Lord of all
And, you believe in his death and resurrection on your behalf
IOW *faith* in Jesus, means believing in who he is and what he's done

2nd, by definition, it means . . .

• Trusting him to apply God's promises to our lives

Faith and trust are synonyms

If you have *faith* in someone, you trust them; To do what they say, and do what they do
If that someone is Jesus, you trust him to fulfill all of God's promises
Which he has and will, b/c *all the promises of God find their yes in him*; Their fulfillment in him (2 Cor 1:20); We can trust him for that

Like his promise to cleanse us of all unrighteousness (1 Jn 1:9)
And his promise to never leave us or forsake us (Heb 13:5)
And complete the good work he began in us (Phil 1:6)
And guarantee our inheritance of eternal life (Eph 1:13-14)

So part of the faith through which we're justified, is trusting Jesus to faithfully apply God's promises, to our lives

3rd, from the book of John, it's . . .

• Depending on him and him alone

Faith in Jesus means depending on him; And him alone

I am the way, and the truth, and the life [Jesus said]. *No one comes to the Father except through me.* (John 14:6); It's him and him alone who is the way
Not Buddha, not Mohammed, not Krishna; Not a priest, not a pastor, not a guru
Not a religion, not an ethic, not a para-church; Not a set of rules or way of thinking
Just total dependence on Jesus; Period

Not a popular statement in the mushy spiritualism of our day

But it's the truth, and therefore the most loving thing I can tell you

B/c Jesus himself said – *No one comes to the Father except through me*

➤ Which rules everything *else* out, even in part; Good works, “means of grace,” acts of righteousness, you name it

We cannot combine dependence on Christ with anything else, and expect God to respond with justification

It's contrary to what he *did* when he died a perfect *sacrifice*; And contrary to what he *said*

Justification is dependent on *faith* alone, in *Christ* alone

- What it's *not* dependent on, is the *strength* of our faith; The intensity of our faith; The *consistency* of our faith; And thank God for that, or we'd all be lost
Check out this little sermon excerpt from Don Carson – a theologian, author, and professor (**Video**)

It's not the *strength* of your faith that justifies, it's the faithfulness of Jesus
As you believe, trust, and depend – in *whatever* measure

Now, that sometimes raises some questions; Like . . .

• **What about my sin? (v17)**

Shouldn't we *stop* sinning if we've been justified by faith? Isn't that the idea?

And b/c we don't, b/c we *keep* sinning as faith-justified saints, doesn't that mean Jesus isn't as great as he says he is?

It's a valid question; And the very response that Paul anticipates; V17

- After saying that no one is justified by works of the law, he says . . .
[17] *But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners*
[just like those who are *un-justified*], *is Christ then a servant of sin?*
If we still sin having been justified by faith, does that mean Jesus is powerless to stop it? Does that mean he's subservient to sin's grip just like *we* are?
Or that he's *responsible* for it? Doing sin's bidding like a servant does his master's

Certainly not! Paul says; As in perish the thought

B/c God *cannot* sin, he's not *tempted* by sin, and he doesn't tempt *us* to sin the Bible says (James 1:13)

If we still sin after being justified, it's no one's fault but ours

He's not responsible, he's not complicit, and he's certainly not powerless

In fact, he's so power-*ful*, that he not only beat the *consequences* of sin, he doesn't count *ours* against us

So the question isn't, "What about my *sin*?" The question is, "What *about* my sin? (**Sum**)

And then there's the question of James

• **What about James? (James 2:24)**

Referring to the *book* of James (**James 2:24**); Where he says in 2:24 . . .

You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.

What? Isn't that just the opposite of what Paul said?

Doesn't Paul say we're justified by *faith* alone? *Apart* from works? Isn't that his point here in Galatians? And doesn't he say it even *more* explicitly in **Rom 3:28**? He does
We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.
What do we do with that? Aren't those 2 scriptures contradictory?

- No; For 2 main reasons:

1. *Justified* means two different *things* in these passages

Remember I said it has a range of meanings?

In Galatians and Romans it means "*declared* righteous;" While in James it means "*shown* to be righteous;" Confirmed by the example of *Abraham* that James gives
So Galatians would read – a person is *declared* righteous by faith *alone* . . .

And James would read – a person is *shown* righteous, by works of faith

That's the 1st reason it's not contradictory – the word justified means 2 different things

2. They're writing for two different *reasons*

Paul was talking to people who were threatened by *legalism* – the belief that doing good *works* justifies us . . .

While *James* was talking to people who were at risk of *license* – the belief that justification is an excuse to party; To live however you want

And that doing so, shows that your faith is *dead*; Useless; Not real

So they were writing to different groups for different reasons, emphasizing different aspects of the same truth

That we are *declared* righteous by faith alone, but *shown* righteous by works of faith***

Which leads us to principle #5; That . . .

5. Justification changes us (v20)

After supporting this all important doctrine with reasons found in v17-19, Paul says *this* in v20; Our *theme* verse for the year

[20] *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Such a *powerful* verse, and a *jam-packed* verse

The bottom line of which is this – justification changes us

It's not just a forensic sort of thing, a legal deal; Pronounced by God from afar, but never felt; It's a grassroots, ground-*level* thing; A heart thing

Affecting every single aspect of our lives, from now to eternity

Because first of all . . .

• **We are released from our past**

Or in Paul's words – *I have been crucified with Christ*; Can we say that together?

Meaning, that when he died physically, we died spiritually

Releasing us from the grip of *sin*, the ravages of guilt, and our old way of living

Just like when our *physical* death releases us from all things *earthly*

At that moment, we're changed; And so too, when we're justified

Not only that, but . . .

• **We are indwelt by God himself**

It is no longer I who live [Paul says], *but Christ who lives in me.* Say it

Justification changes us, b/c the God of the universe lives *within* us

Think of it; How can you *not* be changed by that?

It would be like your favorite actor, your favorite sports hero, your favorite world

leader, and your favorite historical figure, all wrapped up in one, living in your home 24/7/365; Hanging out, having coffee, and doing life

How could that be anything *other* than life-changing?

And then there's the fact that . . .

- **We live his way for his purposes**

The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God; Together

No longer living for myself, but for him; No longer my way, but his

If your faith hasn't changed you in this respect, it hasn't saved you

If you don't *live* for him, chances are you don't love him

It's only through faith in Christ that we're *justified*, and it's only through faith in Christ that we should live

Believing, trusting, and depending – just like you did at the first

And last here . . .

- **It's personal**

He loved me and gave himself for me

It's personal; "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so;" He loves *me*

So much, that he gave his *life* for me; He *died* for me

How can that not *change* you? How can you *possibly* be numb to that?

You can't; Not if you've been justified

It changes who we are, what we want, and how we live (**Summary**)

But . . .

6. How we live does not change our justification (v21)

How we live does not affect our standing before the Lord; The very thing Paul *assures* us of, at the *end* of this passage

And does so, b/c he well knows that failure will plague us in life, and legalism woo us

V21 – *I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then*

Christ died for no purpose.

I do not nullify the grace of God he says, by doing what's wrong, *or* doing what's right;

Either one; That's the idea

We don't render his justifying grace moot or inconsequential by *sinning*, like he talked about in v17; Or by doing good *works*, like he told us in v16; We don't

IOW just like the quality of my *faith* doesn't affect my justification, neither does the

quality of my *life*; The things I do

My behavior, does not affect God's declaration of righteousness

If I sin, I'm still justified; I don't nullify or diminish his grace one iota

And if I live *right*, it doesn't *add* to my justification; Or show that I don't need it

For if righteousness were through the law, if it was gained or lost by the things I do, then Christ died for naught

And we know God doesn't do *anything* for naught (**Summary**)

Which means, how we live does not change our justification, our justification changes

how we live; By changing *us*; Through *faith*; In Jesus

Who *loves* us, personally, and gave himself *for* us

Prayer – Lord, I have no other argument, and no other plea, but that your blood, was shed for me; Use these truths to shape our thinking, conform our lives, and bolster our faith

We love you, and live for you, and now give to you – our tithes and offerings, for your glory, in your church