

What is in view

Because of the richness of the idea, we are going to explore the subject of justification a bit further. We want to understand both the importance of this facet of the Gospel as well as what it implies for us in our day-to-day lives.

What is helpful to note

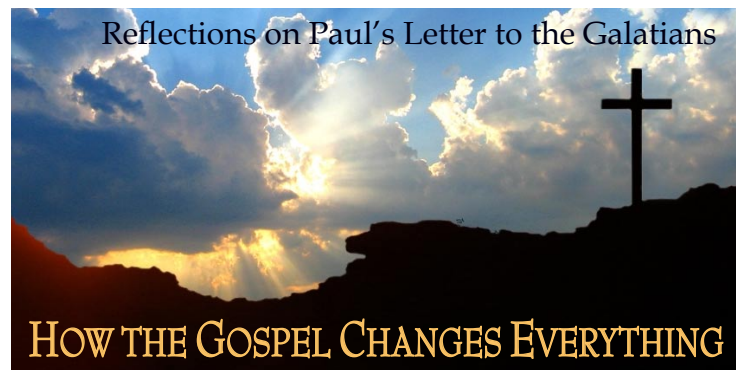
You might want to refer back to last week's notes if you need a "refresher" on the key ideas in Galatians 2:15-21. We aren't going to add much to the explanation of that passage; we do want to explore the implications a bit deeper.

One of the ways to get our arms around the idea of justification is to dip into another passage where Paul speaks of this idea. The 2 Corinthians 5:21 passage can help us. As you look at that passage, one of the critical things to note is the seemingly simply word "*that*" which connects to the two phrases in that verse.

In speaking of Christ "being made to be sin for us," Paul apparently has in mind how Jesus suffered the penalty we were due. Jesus took upon Himself the consequences of our wrong doing. This is the grounds for our *forgiveness*. Forgiveness carries the idea of "cancelling the debt" or "wiping the slate clean" (like we mentioned last week). But pay attention to that little *that*.

The second phrase is touching on another dimension of Christ's work on the cross; this is where we pick up some of our understanding of justification. (The word rendered "righteousness" shares a root idea with the word "justification in Galatians 2:16).

We can graphically represent the verse as follows:



"The Greek word for 'justify' means to declare righteous. A prisoner who is found guilty and is forgiven would not be called 'justified' in the ordinary use of the word. He is justified if he is found not guilty."
John Piper



| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| | He was made to be sin on our behalf | We might become the righteousness of God |
| What need does this address in us? | <i>Our need for relief from the penalty due us for our sin</i> | <i>Our need to have positive holy standing before God</i> |
| What word captures this idea? | <i>Forgiveness: The cancelling of my debt of sin through Christ's work</i> | <i>Justification: The declaration of my full acceptance through Christ's work</i> |

It's not that there isn't a connection between forgiveness and justification—but they are not quite the same thing. Forgiveness removes the offense of our sin so that God can then make a positive declaration of our holy standing before Him (which is the heart of justification). Look to the helpful quotes from John Piper in the margin of the notes.

What to talk about with your group

The opening questions are geared toward helping your people "taste" the experience of forgiveness and begin to think about what justification might be like.

After reading the Galatians passage, spend a little time in reflecting on what it is that you have come to understand (drawing on previous discussions). When you bring the focus down to 2:16, call attention to the idea of justification and how critical it is to Paul's thought here. In truth, there is only one way to be "justified" before God; and living as those who are justified before Him is what we want.

Introduce the 2 Corinthians passage as a "parallel glimpse" at the subject of justification. Point out that the "justification" language in Galatians and the "righteousness" language in 2 Corinthians share roots. And then, walk through the chart, filling in the ideas. You don't have to say it exactly as found in these notes, but help your people identify the differences.

As you bring the time to a close, the last reference can spur on your thinking regarding the implications of justification . . . and can be great grounds for worship. Many Christians wonder, even knowing they are forgiven, whether they have God's full approval; Romans 4:16-5:2 assures us that because of justification we do. The riches of grace bring us to the cross where we find not only forgiveness but our full justification.

"Notice that Paul does not say that [Christ being made sin for us] leads to forgiveness (although it does), or that Christ's becoming sin for us is the same as justification. He says that this happened 'so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.' This result is more than forgiveness. This is our becoming righteous in a way similar to Christ's becoming sin for us."
John Piper

Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

Thinking . . .

Think of some important relationship; imagine that you have hurt the other person. Knowing the wrong you have done, you come and ask for and receive forgiveness. What does it feel like to experience forgiveness?

Now, in the same situation, describe how different it would feel to not be “guilty but forgiven” but to be “not guilty.” What is the difference between the two?

Reflecting . . .

Both forgiveness and being declared “not guilty” are part of our relationship with God through Christ. These ideas are touched on in Galatians 2:15-21. Last week we talked about the idea of “justification.” What does that mean?

Let’s turn to Paul’s comments found in 2 Corinthians 5:21 to help us better understand justification. Talk through that passage with the help of this chart:

| | He was made to be sin on our behalf | We might become the righteousness of God |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| What need does this address in us? | | |
| What word captures this idea? | <i>Forgiveness</i> | <i>Justification</i> |

Responding . . .

Romans 5:1-2 helps us see one facet of the implications of our justification. How do Paul’s words there speak to you?

“Notice that Paul does not say that [Christ being made sin for us] leads to forgiveness (although it does), or that Christ’s becoming sin for us is the same as justification. He says that this happened ‘so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.’ This result is more than forgiveness. This is our becoming righteous in a way similar to Christ’s becoming sin for us.”
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Reflections on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

