

## JUSTIFICATION BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH

TRADITION IS THE LIVING FAITH OF THOSE NOW DEAD;

TRADITIONALISM IS THE DEAD FAITH OF THOSE NOW LIVING.

Traditions are very good when they give us roots and ways of celebrating and remembering. But when they keep people from what is important, like grace and Christian liberty, they can be very bad.

**Martin Luther said** ...IF THE ARTICLE OF JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH IS LOST,

ALL CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE IS LOST.

Paul founded the churches of Galatia - according to the gospel of grace. Afterwards false teachers come along with a different gospel of grace plus the works of the Law. Converts to Christ from among the Gentiles were told that they had to become Jewish, and carry on all the traditions and laws of Moses in order to be saved. In today's text Paul begins teaching that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith.

- 15** “We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;
- 16** nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.
- 17** “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!
- 18** “For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, 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; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.
- 21** “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” Gal. 2:15-21

In verse 15 Paul begins with an ironic statement:

**15** “We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;

The phrase in Jewish speech “Gentile sinners” was used as the opposite concept to all that being Jewish implied.<sup>1</sup>

The flare of irony follows Paul’s story of how he confronted Peter who was being influenced by some Jews of influence from Jerusalem not to associate or eat with Gentile believers. His duplicity was causing a further struggle in the churches in Galatia.

**11** But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

**12** For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

**13** The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.

**14** But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? (2:11-14)

Paul’s phrase “*Gentile sinners*” when compared to “*Jews by nature*” has the idea that Jews who have the Law are sinners in the same way that Gentiles without the Law are sinners. Ultimately both Jews and Gentiles are sinners in need of being justified by faith.

Keep in mind Peter’s declaration at the Jerusalem Council in response to the Judaizers who were troubling the Galatian church:

“Why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they [the Gentiles] also are”

(Acts 15:10-11).

MACARTHUR WRITES,

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<sup>1</sup> Boice, *Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Galatians*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), p. 42.

“No amount of law-keeping can make a person righteous, because the root of sinfulness is in the fallenness of man’s heart, not in actions. Man’s basic problem is in what he is, not in what he does. Sinful acts are but the outward expression of a depraved nature that contains sinful thoughts...”<sup>2</sup>

## Law and Grace

The law is important as a mirror to show us our sinfulness;  
but it can only reveal sin, not remove it.

16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN CHRIST and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

No amount of works of the law can save a person, because even the best of human works cannot change the nature of the person doing them.

ROMANS 3 PUTS IT THIS WAY,

“But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus ... For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law” (Rom. 3:21-24, 28).

“*Justify*” – (dikaioo) is a forensic term borrowed from the law courts. It means, “to declare righteous, or innocent.” The opposite of “to justify” is “to condemn” or “to pronounce guilty.”

Such a term involves an objective standard, and since righteousness is understood to be the unique characteristic of God, that standard must

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<sup>2</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1987), p. 56.

be the divine standard. In themselves, all persons fall short of this standard – “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). But in Christ, God declares all righteous who believe, imputing divine righteousness to them...Justification ... expresses the judicial action of God apart from human merit according to which the guilty are pardoned, acquitted, and then reinstated as God’s children and as fellow heirs with Jesus Christ.”<sup>3</sup>

**JUSTIFICATION TAKES PLACE ONLY AS A PERSON IS UNITED TO CHRIST BY FAITH.**

Vs. 16

***Not justified***

- By the works of the Law (3x’s) – vs. 16

***Justified***

- Through faith in Christ Jesus
- By faith in Christ
- Even we have believed in Christ
  - Lit. “*We have believed into Christ*”
  - IMPLIES AN ACT OF PERSONAL COMMITMENT, NOT JUST ASSENTING TO THE FACTS CONCERNING CHRIST [INTELLECTUAL ASSENT], BUT ACTUALLY RUNNING TO HIM FOR REFUGE AND SEEKING MERCY.
  - FAITH IS TOTAL COMMITMENT TO SUBMIT TO CHRIST AS LORD.

Three-fold emphasis on salvation by faith alone.

Works can justify neither Jew nor Gentile.

...Since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Lit. “All flesh” – mankind without exception

By their behavior, Peter and the other Jewish Christians at Antioch had given approval to the Judaizers’ idea that it was necessary for a Gentile to keep the Jewish rituals before he could become a Christian.

These next few verses completely contradict Judaistic legalism.

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<sup>3</sup> Boice, p. 42-43.

**ANSWERING OBJECTIONS:**

- 17 “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!

Since justification is by faith and not by keeping the Law, then is Paul giving moral license? In other words is there any need to be good?

Antinomianism – “no law” ‘Get saved and sin all you want.’

Paul’s answer: “**May it never be!**” -- (me genoito)

“*Absolutely not*” “*God forbid*” “*Such a thought is abhorrent*”

PAUL WRITES THE SAME WAY TO THE ROMANS,

What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace might increase? May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it?

Romans 6:1-2

The gospel does not promote antinomianism or licentiousness.

Being joined to Christ implies real transformation.

They are “*in Christ,*” and therefore “*a new creation*” – 2 Cor. 5:17

**ANSWERING ACCUSATIONS:**

No doubt Paul had been accused of throwing out the Law by his gospel of Grace, and therefore encouraging sin. However, the opposite is actually true: returning to the Law after establishing a relationship by grace will encourage sin.

- 18 “For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.
- 19 “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

If Paul were to return to the Law after having come to God through faith in Christ, he would make himself a transgressor. Coming to Christ Paul died to the Law. Paul in Romans 7 discusses this very point more thoroughly.

“...I would not have come to know sin except through the Law... when the commandment came, sin became alive, and I died; and this commandment, which was to result in life, proved to result in death for me; for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me. So then, the Law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. Therefore did that which is good become a cause of death for me? May it never be! Rather it was sin, in order that it might be shown to be sin by effecting my death through that which is good by through the commandment sin might become utterly sinful” (Rom. 7:7-13).

The purpose of the law is to reveal sin. It cannot save, but it can bring us to Christ who saves.

“And the Law came in that the transgression might increase; but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, that, as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Rom. 5:20-21).

The law cannot bring life, for no one has ever fulfilled it. Law brings death, for by it all stand condemned. It buries all hope in salvation by works.

**THE BELIEVER IN JESUS HAS DIED TO THE LAW THAT HE MIGHT LIVE FOR GOD.**

20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

The law is not the believer’s master; God is. It is not his relation to the law that saves him, but his relation to God.

Paul is stating the fact that since he has been joined to Christ then he was joined to Christ in his death and resurrection.

In Romans 7 Paul uses marriage as the picture of our union with Christ:

“Therefore, my brethren you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, that we might bear fruit for God” (Rom. 7:4).

“If a man is convicted of a capital crime and is put to death, the law obviously has no more claim on him. He has paid his debt to society. Therefore, even if he were to rise from the dead, he would still be guiltless before the law, which would have no more claim on his new life. So it is with the believer who dies in Christ to rise in new life. He is free forever from any claim of law on him. He paid the law’s demand when he died in Christ. His physical death is no punishment, only a release to glory provided in his union with Christ”<sup>4</sup>

If Paul is joined to Christ in His death and resurrection,

- He is dead to sin and the law.
- He is just as alive as the resurrected Christ.

The resurrected life he is now living he is living through the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ within him....

**WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE “IN CHRIST”?** It means to be so united to Christ that all the experiences of Christ become the Christian’s experiences.

***I have been crucified with Christ*** – perfect tense

- refers to something that has happened in the past  
but whose influence continues into the present.

“I’m not living, but Christ is alive in me.”

“I am living, but I live by faith in Christ

PERFECT MOTIVE OF CHRIST:

... who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

The true Christian life is not so much a believer’s living for Christ as Christ’s living through the believer.

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<sup>4</sup> MacArthur, p. 60.

**Summary and Conclusion:**

21 “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” Gal. 2:21

Paul answered the objections of his critics; now he is objecting to them.

If they are right Christ died in vain.

The grace of God for salvation and the death of Christ are the heart and soul of Christianity. If our salvation is from our works, then neither grace nor Christ’s death have any significance.

Two pillars of the gospel are the grace of God and the death of Christ ... by their very nature legalism destroys. The person who insists that he can earn salvation by his own efforts undermines the very foundation of Christianity and nullifies the precious death of Christ on his behalf.