

Galatians 6 – The Doctrine of Justification

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We are in a sermon series on the book of Galatians called Freedom Through Christ. We've seen that the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to address false teaching that was deceiving the Galatian churches.

False teachers called Judaizers were teaching that in order to be saved, it is not enough to have faith in Jesus Christ; one must also obey the Law of Moses. This was the issue Paul addressed in Galatians – law vs. grace.

In the first 2 chapters of Galatians Paul defends his apostleship and the gospel of grace. Now we are moving into the second section where Paul explains the Gospel of Grace.

The title of my sermon today is The Doctrine of Justification. Our text is Galatians 2:15-21. Verses 15-16 say:

We who are Jews by birth and not so-called 'Gentile sinners' know that people are not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, for by works of the law no one will be justified.

In Galatians Paul attacks the misbelief that we can be saved by keeping the law. That deception is still prevalent today because it appeals to our flesh. Something in us wants to believe we can do it - we can earn God's favor. But the gospel truth is that **Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation; we only need to believe and be saved.** In fact – before you are saved – the only good work you can do is to repent and place your faith in Jesus Christ as your Savior! In John 6:29 Jesus said:

This is the only work God wants from you: Believe in the One He has sent.

We receive salvation by grace through faith, not by works. Justification is an extremely important truth we must understand because it is a crucial part of our salvation. Justification is more than forgiveness. Forgiveness says you've done wrong, but I release you from what you've done. Justification is much more than that. **Forgiveness is the subtraction of guilt, but justification is the addition of righteousness.**

As a boy growing up in the Baptist church, I used to hear it this way all the time. When I am justified, it is "just-as-if-I'd" never sinned.

Strong's Concordance says that the word **justify means:**
To make just or innocent. To make righteous.

Thayer's Greek Lexicon says it means:

1. **To declare one to be just, righteous, and therefore acceptable**
2. **To declare an accused person to be guiltless**

Justification is a legal concept. The person who is 'justified' is the one who gets a not guilty verdict in a court of law. In the Bible, it means the getting a favorable verdict before God on judgment day.

The incredible thing about justification is that God forgives and accepts sinners. How is that possible? I'm fixing to tell you! Essentially, you must understand the good news and the bad news. R. C. Sproul said it this way: "We will never understand the grace and mercy of God until we understand the justice and wrath of God." The bad news is found in Romans 1:18

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

That includes all of us because all of us have been ungodly and unrighteous! That means that God's wrath will be poured out on us.

So where is the good news? **The good news is that for believers in Jesus Christ – the wrath of God was already poured out on us – in CHRIST!** Jesus died FOR us – means He died on our behalf. But He also died AS us – He took our place and bore our sin and the wrath of God was poured out on us IN HIM on the cross! Romans 5:6-8 says:

You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Jesus died for ungodly people. I've witnessed to people who told me they couldn't come to Christ because they were so bad. So, I would ask them, "So you are bad. Would you say you are ungodly?" They would say, "Very ungodly."

To which I would say, "Congratulations! You have taken the first step to coming to Christ because you must first realize that you are ungodly. And Jesus died for ungodly sinners just like you!"

When ungodly people repent and turn to Christ, He forgives them. Not only that, He justifies them. Romans 4:4-5 says:

Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.

How can God possibly justify the ungodly?

Romans 5:9 says: ***We have been justified by His blood...***

God justifies us not because of what we have done, but because of what Jesus has done. Please stop thinking that there is anything you can possibly add to the work of Christ on the cross. You will never experience spiritual rest as long you are looking to yourself to provide anything additional to the work of Christ.

It's only when you truly believe that the cross was enough that you will overcome condemnation and experience spiritual rest. Romans 5:1 says:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

When we truly understand justification, we will experience peace! That's because, not only does the blood of Christ forgive us, save us and justify us, but Romans 5:9-10 says:

Since we have now been justified by His blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through Him! For if, when we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to Him through the death of His Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through His life!

Before we are saved, we have no righteousness and we owe debts we can never repay. But when we are saved, God does not count those sins against us. Instead, He deposits His very own righteousness into our accounts and we are now right with God through faith in Jesus Christ.

Justification is a divine act where God declares the sinner to be innocent of his sins. This justification is based on the shed blood of Jesus.

We know that many people live in fear of the wrath of God. What they fail to realize is that for Christians – the wrath of God has already been poured out. Jesus bore the punishment for our sins on the cross. Therefore, God no longer treats us like sinners, but as His children.

The blood of Jesus has the power to save us from God's wrath and give us peace us peace with God and power to stand against all condemnation.

With this in mind, do you realize that every time you place yourself or others under the law you are nullifying the grace of God? Galatians 2:21 says:

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!

If keeping the law could save us, what would be the point of Jesus dying for us? Remember, Jesus asked the Father on the night He was betrayed if there was any other way of salvation, please spare Me from going to the cross.

Jesus was not spared the cross, because there is no other way to accomplish what He did. We know the Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. And when we think of other ways, we are usually thinking of other religions. But every religion other than Christianity has one thing in common: they teach salvation by works. They are all based on their followers earning their way to heaven.

But Paul says your own works, including keeping the law, does nothing to make us righteous. If we did nothing but good every day for the rest of our lives, we could not make ourselves good enough. **We must have the righteousness of Christ, not our own righteousness.**

In Philippians 3 Paul lists all the ways he kept God's law. Then he says this about his accomplishments in Philippians 3:8-9

I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ — the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith.

If the apostle Paul did not want to stand before God on his own merits, how much more should we depend on the merit of Christ. Again, Galatians 2:16 says:

Clearly no one is justified before God by the law, because, "The righteous will live by faith."

Righteousness only comes by faith. And by the way - **trying to live holy does not produce faith, but true faith will produce holy living.**

The main objection of the Judaizers against justification by faith rather than by works is that Christians still sinned (as if the Judaizers didn't).

As the Judaizers saw it, the idea that we are made right before God by faith in Jesus *alone* wasn't enough because Christians still struggled with sin. How could they be "accepted by God if they still battled sin?"

In the Judaizers' thinking, this made Christ a minister of sin, because Jesus' work of making them right with God apparently didn't make them right enough. Paul answers this objection in Galatians 2:17.

If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!

Paul's answer was brilliant.

First, *yes*, we seek to be justified by Christ and not by Jesus *plus* our own works. Second, *yes*, acknowledge that we still sin even though we are justified by Christ. But *no*, this certainly does not make Jesus the author or approver of sin in our

life. He does not promote sin and He never will.

But always remember, a Christian is not somebody who has no sin, but somebody whose sin God no longer holds against them. That's the good news! Paul goes on to say in Galatians 2:18

If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker.

In this brilliant statement, Paul turns the Judaizers' argument back on their own heads by saying that if he tried to rebuild a way to God through keeping the Law of Moses, then he would make himself a transgressor.

The Judaizers thought they had to hang on to the Law so there wouldn't be so much sin. What Paul shows is that by putting themselves under the law again they were sinning worse than ever.

How is it a sin to build again a way to God through the Law of Moses? In many ways, but perhaps the greatest is that it looks at Jesus, hanging on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved, bearing the wrath of God for us, and says to Him, "Thank You, that's all very nice, but it isn't enough. Your work on the cross won't be good enough before God until I'm circumcised and eat kosher."

In pursuing justification with God we must stop trying to add anything of our own to the righteousness of Christ! This is a great insult to the Son of God. This dishonors Christ by minimizing the extent of Christ's work on the cross. When we do this we are saying Jesus is not enough and He needs our assistance! Listen! **Jesus Christ is not a partial Savior! He is not an incomplete Savior! He is not a limited Savior! He is either all we need for our justification or He no part in our justification!**

It is a hard thing to bring proud hearts to trust in Christ alone for righteousness. And this is the great tragedy of legalism. In trying to be *more* right with God, legalists end up being *less* right with God. This was exactly the situation of the Pharisees that opposed Jesus so much during His years of earthly ministry. Paul knew this thinking well, having been a Pharisee himself. Paul revealed the only way to deal with this in Galatians 2:19

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

Paul said that the only way to actually live for God is to die to the law.

If he was dead to the law, then it was impossible for the law to be the way that he was justified and made righteous by God. Notice that it wasn't the law that was dead. The law reflects the holy heart and character of God. It wasn't the law that died, but Paul died to the law.

How did Paul die to the law? ***Through the law I died to the law.***

The law itself “killed” Paul by showing him that he never could live up to its holy standard.

For a long time before Paul knew Jesus, he thought God would accept him because of his law-keeping. But he came to the point where he really understood the law — and that understanding made him see that the law made him guilty before God, not justified before God.

This sense of guilt brought on by legalism “killed” Paul and made him see that keeping the law wasn’t the answer. John Calvin said, *To die to the law* is to renounce it and to be freed from its dominion, so that we have no confidence in it and it does not hold us captive under the yoke of slavery.

The problem with the *Judaizers* was that they were not dead to the law. They were very much alive to the law. They believed keeping the law would make them accepted by God.

When Paul died to the law, then he could live to God. As long as he still tried to justify himself before God by all his law-keeping, he was dead. But when he died to the law then he could live to God.

If righteous comes through the law then Jesus died in vain — because you can be righteous before God by law-keeping, and you don’t need the work of Jesus to make you righteous.

This is why we need to die to ourselves and die to the law! This is why we must stop seeing the grace of God as something that helps us get to heaven, as if we put forth the best we can, and then grace supplies the rest.

Grace doesn’t help, grace does it all. All of our righteousness comes from the work of Jesus on our behalf.

I said earlier that justification is a legal term and I want to close with this illustration. Suppose you killed someone and were put on trial for murder. But you decided not to defend yourself or let anyone else try to justify your behavior. In fact, you confessed your guilt and your sorrow for your crime to the judge and the family of your victim.

So, based on your confession the judge declares you guilty of murder in the first degree. Then he says that the punishment for your crime requires the death penalty.

But then, much to your surprise, the judge says, “I love you and I have a way for you to be justified in the sight of the law. I am willing for someone else to take on the guilt and penalty of your crime and if someone does I will declare them guilty and you innocent.”

To which you say, “I don’t know anyone who would die in my place.”
 To which the judge says, “I do! I have an only son who also loves you and he is willing to die in your place.”

Then the judge calls his son into the courtroom and asks, “Son, are you willing to take on the guilt and punishment for this person’s crime?” And the son answers, “Yes I am.”

So the judge responds, “Son, even though you are totally innocent, I pronounce you guilty of the crime of murder and I sentence you to death.”

Then the judge turns to you and says, “Since my son has been declared guilty of your crime and will take the punishment for your crime, I now pronounce you innocent of this crime. Your record will be expunged and no one can bring charges for this crime against you ever again.”

And you say, “But judge, that would mean you are treating me “just-as-if-I’d” never committed a crime. And the judge says, “Exactly! You got it and you are free to go.”

Then you walk out of the courtroom as the son goes to the place where the death penalty is carried out on him.

Now, that sounds too good to be true. And in our legal system it’s impossible. But in God’s court this is exactly what has happened to each of us!
 We have all sinned and the wages of sin is death!
 But Jesus Christ, who was innocent of sin, took on all of our sin so that we might become righteous – justified – in the sight of God.

Our only work is to believe in the One whom the Father sent down to earth to take the punishment for our sins.
 Have you ever done that?
 Have you given Jesus your sin and received His righteousness?
 Have you ever stopped trying to justify your sin and instead placed your faith in His finished work on the cross?
 If not, do so today, and you can walk out of here saying, “It’s “just-as-if-I’d” never sinned.