

The Gospel's Defense: Justification

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[0 : 00] Well, if you would, open your Bibles to Galatians chapter 2. Galatians chapter 2.

We're going to look at verse 11 through 16 this morning. Kind of stopped right there in part of Galatians and just picking it up there in verse 11.

And really our focus this morning is going to be verse 16. And so, anyway, we good? Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

All right, we're going to start with verse 11. Here we go. Let's read the word of the Lord. But when Cephas, and everybody knows that that's Peter, right? When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

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.

[1 : 07] The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 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?

We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles. 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 works of the law, since by the works of the law no flesh will be justified.

This is the word of the Lord and all God's people said. Amen. Now, I just want to dive into this just quickly here and give a little bit of why we're here, because Paul is writing this letter to a group of churches.

They have people who've come into their churches and who are teaching them a false gospel, and as he is relaying why it is that the gospel is from God and therefore they need to listen to it and not change it, part of what happens is he has to confront Peter.

Now, think about Peter for just a second. Peter was an apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ. He walked with Christ. He ate with Jesus. He lived with Jesus for three years.

[2 : 47] As a matter of fact, he knows the truth. He believes the right thing, both in his head and in his heart. He has visited with Paul and never once corrected Paul's theology, so their theology is exactly the same.

And Paul, Peter right here in Galatians, this is after Acts chapter 10, where he's gone to see Cornelius, a Gentile, whom he ate with.

And this is after chapter 11, where he goes back to Jerusalem and tells them, hey, God is saving the Gentiles in the same way he's saving the Jews. So what you have is you have Peter, who now all of a sudden, that he's in Antioch, is afraid of this group of men who come up and their presence makes him begin to live differently.

And you'll notice a couple of things. Number one, it says men from James, and it doesn't mean that James sent them. It just means that they came from the direction where James was, which was in Jerusalem.

And these men, they're called the party of the circumcision. And the point is, is that they're also called Judaizers. Their belief was that Gentiles needed, in order to be saved, needed to not only believe in Jesus, but also be circumcised.

[4 : 14] And so when Peter won't eat with them, in essence, his behavior is saying the Judaizers are right. I can't eat with these people because they're uncircumcised.

So he has the theology correct in his head. He has the theology correct in his heart, but he's still living as a hypocrite. And Paul calls him out on it.

And as he calls him out, he lays out for him the theology of the gospel. And what we want to do is focus in on verse 16, because that is the core and the heart of the entire letter to the Galatians. And in this verse, you'll notice that he uses three phrases three times each. As a matter of fact, if you read it, you'll find yourself going like, didn't he just say that?

Didn't he just say that? Didn't he just say that? And he did. He says justification, works of the law, faith or belief.

[5 : 18] And he says each one of them three times. So these are very important phrases. And so the sermon this morning is that I'm going to take each one of those, justification, works of the law, faith in Christ.

And I want to define those words as we understand them from scripture. And then we'll talk a couple of lessons that we should learn from that. But that's going to be what the sermon is. Just define these words. These are important words. We need to understand these words. So with that, we'll have one more drink.

Now this word justification, the Greek word behind it, it can mean several different things in different contexts. When James uses it, he doesn't mean exactly the same thing that Paul is saying.

When Paul uses it in certain different contexts, it's not exactly the same thing in each one of those. You have to look at the context. And for our purposes, the context is telling us in verse 21 that this is the kind of justification that's about righteousness.

[6 : 28] But the heart of the word justification is the idea of a verdict. It comes from the legal system, and a verdict is being rendered.

All right? So then theologically, what this word means, it means four things. And I'm going to put them up on the screen kind of a way for you to remember this.

Justification is an act of God's free grace. It's an act of God's free grace. This is something that God does, not us.

God is the one who justifies, not men. Secondly, it's his pardoning and forgiving our sins. In justification, this is where our sins get forgiven.

We're turned loose from them. That's what the word forgive means. Third, it's his declaring us righteous by counting Jesus' righteousness to us.

[7 : 29] Now, that is the most important point. All right? I mean, all of it is important, but if I had to pick one that says this is where there's the dividing line between us and others, it's here. And that is his declaring us righteous by counting Jesus' righteousness to us.

And fourthly, it is received by faith alone. It is received by faith alone. Now, let me see if I can help us with the understanding of this.

I want you to think for just a second about the second person of the Trinity. The second person of the Trinity has existed from all eternity. He took on flesh.

He became human and came to this world. Even though he himself, in himself, God Almighty, is holy, holy, holy, the second person of the Trinity took on flesh.

He took on flesh and lived a perfect life. He obeyed his Father at every whim. He did exactly what his Father wanted him to do.

[8 : 37] It didn't matter if he was traveling. It didn't matter if it was the Sabbath day. It didn't matter where. He perfectly obeyed his Father. And because he was 100% God and 100% man, he had to obey his Father in order to prove, to demonstrate, to earn and merit his own righteousness.

Because where Adam failed, the second Adam, Jesus Christ, had to succeed and be perfectly righteous.

That's what my jacket over here is representing. My jacket here is representing Jesus' own righteousness. It's what he earned. It's what he merited.

It's what he won by his obedience to his Father from birth to death, mind, heart, and soul. Now, we need to bring us into the discussion for a second to really understand what's going on here.

I want you to, this is one analogy, a coat, and I'm going to come back to it. But I want you to think of another analogy. I want you to think about a debt account or a loan account or a credit account, however you would like to understand it.

[10 : 01] And some of you are financial people. You understand these things better than I do. But we're talking about an account in which you have debt. And you have to pay this debt back.

Now, how many of you, if you had a debt of \$20, could pay that back? Yeah, if you had a debt of \$20, you could pay that back. The higher that number gets, the more difficult it becomes.

And so, to try to illustrate our sin against God, I want you to imagine that the debt we have is \$100 trillion.

Now, I know you can't pay that back because even our government can't pay that back. You have a debt of \$100 trillion.

Now, here's the way righteousness, the righteousness of Jesus works. It is His declaring us righteous based upon the righteousness of Christ.

[11:03] So, it's also the forgiveness of sins. So, here's your account. He forgives you of your sins. So, that \$100 trillion debt comes to zero.

But that is not enough to get you into heaven. You must have \$100 trillion credit.

You must have law-perfect righteousness. You can't just be forgiven and get back to zero. You have to have the law-perfect righteousness.

And what Jesus does is that because of His, what the Father does because of what Jesus did, is the Father credits to our account the righteousness of Jesus.

So, we go from zero to \$100 trillion credit. Law-perfect righteousness. And the reason we have to have that righteousness, you'll notice in Psalm 24, it says, Who may ascend to the hill of the Lord, and who may stand in His holy place?

[12:13] He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to falsehood, and is not sworn deceitfully. If we do not have that law-perfect righteousness, we can never be with God.

We can never be in heaven. We cannot be saved. We must have that. The problem is, is we don't. You and I are born with this debt. We add to this debt all of our life. And forgiveness alone is not enough.

There must be righteousness added to us. So, how does that come about? How does that come about? Well, the Judaizers were teaching that it comes about by works of the law.

So, let's talk about works of the law for a second. The work of the law, specifically in mind here, from the Judaizers, was circumcision.

[13:21] Now, we might think to ourselves, well, this is just one law of many. If you go back to the Old Covenant, which we'll talk about in a second, that's just one law, just one law of many. Why would this be a problem?

Well, here's what Paul has to say about it. In Galatians chapter 5, verse 2 through 3, Behold, I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.

And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision that he's under obligation to keep the whole law. Paul is setting up a choice for you. He's setting up a choice for the Judaizers.

He's setting up a choice for the Galatians. You need law, perfect righteousness, and your choices are this. Trust in the obedience of Christ or in your own obedience.

But you can't have both. You either trust what Jesus has done and his righteousness, or you're going to have to do it on your own. That's what he's saying here.

[14:19] And the reason he's saying that if you submit to the circumcision, you're under obligation to keep the whole law is because of what we need to understand about the law as the Old Covenant.

This law that's written here is the Old Covenant. You could say it's the Mosaic Covenant. It's what we normally understand of as last part of Exodus, the book of Leviticus. It's the Old Covenant that God gave to his people so that they might live in the land.

They would get land, seed, and blessing, and it was a conditional covenant. It had in it the moral law summarized in the Ten Commandments. It had in it the civil law, which is how they are to take care of their government.

It had the ceremonial law that had sacrifices, tabernacle, priests, feast days. Circumcision was the inaugural sign that you're in the covenant.

In other words, they would give this circumcision to their male infants, eight days old, and that would inaugurate them, that would draft them, that would put them into this covenant.

[15:26] If you came from some other country and decided, hey, I want to be a Jew, and you were a man, well, then you could be. You just have to go through circumcision because this is the way that you get put into the covenant.

You put yourself there. So by the Galatians taking on circumcision, they were saying, we're now under the Old Covenant, which is why Paul says, you have to be obligated to keep all of it.

And if you're going to go that way, then Jesus is of no use to you. Now, here's the thing. Anytime we seek to try to obey some command of God in order to earn or merit any kind of righteousness or standing or favor from God, we're walking down the same path that the Galatians walked.

Even in today, there are some people who would tell us that in order to be saved, in order to have this righteousness, you have to be baptized as well.

But the problem with that is that it adds something to faith. There are some who would say that you have to have faith working through love.

[16:45] Faith working through love. And that love there points to the idea of love your neighbor as yourself, which is right out of the Old Covenant, Leviticus chapter 19. Love working, faith working through love is adding to faith.

You cannot have this righteousness by any work of the law at all. But there's even some, and they're of the Baptist stripe, who would even say that what we have to do is you have to walk an aisle.

I had a friend of mine who was pastoring a church and there was a young man who came to his office. He prayed to receive Christ. His sister called the pastor the next month, just panicking, saying, I'm just not sure my brother's really saved.

And a pastor friend of mine says, well, why do you think your brother's not really saved? She said, because he didn't walk the aisle. There's nothing about walking the aisle that saves you. That is just for us to be able to be here for you, to offer counsel and pray with you.

You can get saved right where you're sitting, right here, right now, today. Call upon the Lord and he will save you. You can be out fishing this afternoon. You can be on your lawnmower.

[17:54] You can be driving to San Antonio. You can wake up in the morning drinking a cup of coffee and call upon the Lord and be saved right in that moment. We add nothing but faith.

We come and receive this by faith and faith alone no works of the law. So then let's talk about what exactly faith is.

Faith is mentioned three times here as well. So what is faith? Well, the first thing I want to say about faith and this comes from both Ephesians chapter 2 verse 8 and 9 as well as 2 Timothy 2 25 is that faith and repentance go together and they are a gift from God.

They come from God. But what is faith? Faith is both a conviction and a commitment. Faith is a conviction and a commitment.

A conviction of the truth of the gospel. That's what faith is. Faith is a conviction of the truth of the gospel. I know who Jesus is. I know what Jesus has done. I know what sin I have.

[19:03] I know what I'm supposed to do. I know that I'm supposed to have faith. I know what he's going to do when I have faith. I believe all of those things are true. They're not fairy tales. They're absolutely true. I have a conviction of that truth.

That conviction alone is not enough. See, it's a little bit like this chair. I have a conviction about this chair.

The conviction about this chair is that it's designed to hold weight and put my big self in it and it's not going to die. Sit down in it gently or plop down in it.

Either way, this chair, if you look at the construction, it's going to hold my weight. I have that conviction of that truth. But that conviction doesn't matter if I never sit in it.

It's not holding up my weight. I must sit in the chair for my rantings about my convictions to be worth anything at all.

[20:10] And so, I commit myself to the chair. And what's holding me up? The chair.

You see, faith is a conviction of the truth of the gospel, but it is also a commitment to the Christ of the gospel.

You know who he is. You know what he's done. And so, therefore, commit yourself to him. I believe very firmly that a lot of people in a lot of churches have a conviction of the truth of the gospel, but they've never committed their heart to the Lord Jesus Christ.

My prayer, my prayer today is that even as I'm talking to you right now as the Holy Spirit, he would convict you that that's who you are, that you've never committed yourself to Christ, and that right where you sit, you would say, Lord Jesus, please save me.

I'm yours. I'm committed to you. I take you as mine. You're my boss. You're my master. You're my Lord. You're my Savior. You're my all. You're my treasure. You're my joy. You've done this for me.

[21 : 28] I'm yours. Well, those are the three words, and it's really important for us to grasp this doctrine of justification by faith alone because it has some benefit for us to know this, to know this doctrine, and to know what this doctrine brings about, to know what Christ has done and what it brings about in our lives is powerful and good for us.

So I just want to talk about a couple of things that justification brings to us. The first one comes from Romans chapter 4, verse 1 through 5, and if you read through that Romans chapter 4, verse 1 through 5, you get this massive sense that Paul is saying the same thing there as he is in Galatians, and the reason for that is because he is.

He is. As a matter of fact, he talks about works and faith here in Romans chapter 4, verse 5, but one of the powerful things in this verse that just astounds me, and the first time I heard it, I've been a Christian for years and years and years.

I have been preaching, I've been studying, and I saw this word for the first time and it blew me away. I don't know if it'll blow you away. You probably already know this, but in Romans chapter 4, he talks in verse 4, he says, Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as is due.

But the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness. That's very similar to what Paul's talking about in Galatians, but right there in the middle of that, there's a word that we read over pretty quickly and we don't think about very deeply.

[23 : 18] You can't do work and get righteousness. You must believe and you believe in him and you believe in him who justifies and you believe in him who justifies the ungodly.

He justifies the ungodly. That's why he met the woman at the well.

That's why he picked the disciples that he picked. That's why he told the story of the Pharisee and the publican. Because if you think you've got no problem, if you think that you're okay, if you think you're a fairly upstanding citizen, then he hasn't come for you.

He comes for those who are ungodly and who know it. He comes for those and he justifies them.

He gives them his righteousness. He covers them with his righteousness.

In our court system, if we had a judge come up and just say that the guilty man is innocent, we would say it was a miscarriage of justice. Yet here's God justifying the ungodly.

[24 : 32] And that is our hope because every one of us is ungodly. But there's more.

In Romans chapter 5, verse 1, we have peace with God because of our justification. In Romans chapter 5, verse 9, having been justified, we're now saved from his wrath.

You know, you put those two together and what you have is that when we were justified, when we had that trillion dollar debt and we trusted in Christ and he covered us with his righteousness and so he forgave that and gave us that, in that moment, we ceased to be at war with God.

We ceased to be enemies of God. The hostilities between God and me are over. They're done. If you're a Christian and you've trusted Christ, you are no longer at war with God.

You are at peace with him. The wrath of God is not for you. He's not going to punish you. I don't know if that, I mean, y'all just looking at me kind of like going like, yeah, okay, okay.

[25 : 47] I mean, if you don't get that and that doesn't excite you, then something's wrong. I'm not saying you got to be somebody loud shouting. I don't need you to do that. I'll just get distracted.

But I'm just saying, you need to know that this is our joy, this is our delight, that the God of the universe who created all things, whose throne is justice and righteousness, he is at peace with us. He goes on in 1 Corinthians 6, verse 9 through 11, and he begins to talk to the Corinthians because the Corinthians had a problem. They had lots of sin.

And he was telling them, listen, all of you sinners, you're not going to inherit the kingdom of God.

Listen to this list. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.

But he says something in the next verse that's astounding. Such were some of you, but you have been justified.

[27 : 12] In other words, our justification not only gives us peace with God, it not only gives us that we're escaping the wrath of God, but it means that we're no longer defined by our sin.

You know, one of the tenets of AA is that you have to admit that you're an alcoholic. It's the one thing I find super objectionable for the Christian to do. As a Christian, if you, if you had this debt and you've trusted in Christ and you've been covered with his righteousness, then you should never,

ever, ever, ever, ever, ever say again that you're an alcoholic.

Instead, you should say, I am blood-bought child of God. You are not defined by your sin any longer. Whatever it was in your past that was there, it is not who you are today.

You are a child of God. You have been justified. And the last thing I'll say is that in Titus chapter 3 verse 7, he says that being justified by his grace, he has made us heirs.

He's made us heirs. I mean, if you think to yourself about a king who rides into a nation and he overthrows the tyrannical ruler of that nation because he's enslaved a bunch of people, and then he rides back out to his homeland, everybody celebrates the day of freedom.

[28 : 42] Everybody's glad that tyranny was put down. Everybody's rejoicing at the kindness of the king who came in. And many times as we look at salvation, I feel like that's the way we look at God, that one day he came and he saved us.

But that's not the whole picture. the whole picture is that the king then walked through the streets and started getting people and saying, okay, you who once were slaves, you're my son, you're my daughter, you're my son, you're my daughter, come home with me.

Come home with me and now I'm going to put you on equal footing with my one and only son. And now you're going to be princes and princesses. Now you're going to be sons of God. you're going to be heirs and I have an inheritance waiting for you.

You see, he chose you, he saved you, he loved you, he made you his own. Can I dare say that he likes you?

He wants you to be with him forever. And in that justification, he made you his own. this is why we need to know this doctrine, why we need to believe it, because these things, these things help us to grow in Christ.

[30 : 08] Because so often there are two kinds of Christians that I have found, there are two kinds of Christians that I have found. The first kind is the Christian who thinks to themselves that they've never really had very much sin at all.

Like, man, I got saved, and you know, everything's been great, and I really, I don't see anything wrong with my behavior, and then you start pointing things out, and they kind of go like, oh, okay, yeah, well, yeah, okay, I got a little bit of sin then.

And so they struggle to kind of see their own sin sometimes. There's some Christians that just think, well, maybe, you know, it's there, and you've got to kind of, those Christians, you have to kind of push a little bit and have to kind of step on toes a little bit and say, yeah, you didn't really think about that, did you?

But there are other Christians that I have found who, you say, you're not reading your Bible enough, and they're going to go home and weep for hours and say that I'm not saved, I'm just not saved, there's no way I'm saved, I haven't read my Bible yesterday, there's no way that I'm really a Christian, and they're going to doubt their salvation, and that's a little bit of a character, but that's what I'm finding, and both of those kinds of Christians need to learn that you are justified by faith alone, it is the righteousness of Christ that covers you, you are at peace with him, you're not going to face wrath, and because of that, those of you who are going to weep because you feel like that maybe you're unaccepted, you need to know you're accepted in the beloved, and those of you who think, man, I don't know if I have really very much sin, you do, look at what Jesus did for you to see how much your sin cost.