

# Galatians 2:15-21

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[ 0 : 00 ] Pray, shall we? Our Lord, indeed, it's only in your will that we are free.

And so, Lord, all of our ambitions and hopes and plans, we surrender into your hands, knowing that your hands are those who have created the world in which we live, have guided and preserved our every step, and are taking your creation and your world towards the glorious future where you rule and you reign in righteousness and holiness and love.

So, Lord, as we come to your word this morning, we pray that by your spirit you would work in us a sweet longing to be free in your will. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.

Well, we're continuing our series in Galatians this morning, friends. We're looking at Galatians chapter 2. We're going to finish off Galatians chapter 2 this morning. We're going to start with verse 15 and read through the end of the chapter, verse 21.

Turn there in the pew Bible, you can follow along with me. Galatians chapter 2, verse 15.

[ 1 : 33 ] Paul writes this, We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. 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.

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.

For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ.

It's 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.

[ 2 : 37 ] I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Now you can tell from just reading the passage, this is a very complex and intricate and deep passage.

This is sort of one of those moments when you're out on the lake and you can see almost the whole way down into the deep cool waters beneath. So we're not going to get to every single detail this morning.

We're not going to be able to cover it all in one swing. But let me just start with one very general observation that I think will get us into the heart of what Paul's doing here. Glance your eyes over verses 15 through 16 again.

You'll see that these verses are all about being justified. The word is there over and over. And that's a legal word. It means to be pronounced righteous by a judge. To be justified is the opposite of being condemned.

To be justified is to be declared right, to be approved, to be accepted. But notice then in verses 17 through 20, suddenly the language of righteousness and justification give way to talk about life.

[ 3 : 46 ] And I, I rebuild what I tore down, the life I live that I might live to God. Now the talk is about life and lifestyle and identity.

And then in verse 21, we end where we started. Righteousness and justification. Now I want you to notice these two themes here right from the start. Justification and identity. Righteousness and life. You see, the Bible ties these two things very closely together. They're like a vine that are intertwined, twisting and turning around one another. And the latter we're very concerned about today, aren't we?

Identity and lifestyle. The self, the I. Who am I? What shape will my life take? How can I construct my own identity? How can I forge a self that fits with who I am or who I want to be, right?

That's what we're after today. But the Bible, you see, gives us this very penetrating analysis. It gives us a profound insight that we really need to see to understand ourselves.

[ 4 : 49 ] It says that underneath our lifestyle, you see, is the question of righteousness. And back behind our issues with identity and our questions about who we are, back behind those things and underneath them is the problem of justification.

Now, maybe justification isn't a word you lose sleep over. Maybe you've never heard the word before in your life. But in reality, justification is your ultimate concern.

You might not think so, but oh, it is. You see, here's the deal, friends. We're all looking to something or someone to lay down a verdict on our life.

Are we not? We're all looking to some external court to grant our lives meaning and purpose and approval. To know that we've lived life well. That we've lived it right.

In other words, you could say we all have a judge. And we all seek a righteousness that will favor that judge. And you can put anyone in that place, really. Think about it. Your peers, they can be the one to pass judgment.

[ 6 : 01 ] History, the next generation, your parents, spouse, your children, whatever. And each one of those things, we can set up a different standard by which we can be deemed righteous, approved, accepted, validated, or unrighteous, condemned, and rejected.

And whatever we hold up before our so-called self-appointed judge, that is our righteousness. Think about it. Are your kids your judge?

Are they the ones you need to pronounce the verdict over your life? Are you living as if their opinion of you is what finally matters at the end of the day? If so, what do you think will bring their positive sentence?

If you give them everything they ask for, will that do it? If you save up a lot of money and leave them with a big inheritance, how about that? Now, maybe you say, hold on a second, preacher man.

I'm my own judge. No one judges me. Yeah? But think about it, friend. Do you really want to say that you don't care at all what others think? On the one hand, if you push that to the extreme, you'll actually become a monster, won't you?

[ 7 : 11 ] To not care at all what others think. But on the other hand, when you say, when we say, I'm my own judge, it really means that you're under the worst judge of all. You see, it's utterly naive to think that your own thoughts and your own values haven't been shaped by your culture and your upbringing and your education.

No one is utterly autonomous. No one is completely unbounded by history and culture. So when you say, I'm my own judge, no, actually you're not. In fact, you're simply going to judge yourself according to the passing whims of this brief, cultural, historical moment in which we live.

That's going to be the determiner of your life. And what a wicked and sad place to be. Now how do we explain this underlying feature of our common humanity?

We've got a lot of ground to cover. I wish we could talk more about this. But how do we explain it? Let's get to the heart of the matter. Is it pathological? Is it weakness? Is it repressed something or other? No, actually.

You see, according to the Bible, we were created to find our meaning and our purpose and our approval and our delight in the good declaration of God over us. His pronouncement was meant to be our affirmation and our source of life.

[ 8 : 32 ] Think back. When God created the first humans, Genesis 1, what did he do? What was the first thing he did when he brought them from the dust? He blessed them. He spoke a word of favor over them and said, be fruitful and multiply.

And there they were in right relationship to him. And in one of Jesus' parables, when he says that when we reach the end of our journey, what are the words that we're all going to long to hear? Well, good.

Well done. Good and faithful servant. That's what our lives are meant to be structured on. You see, our maker is our judge.

He is the one who has the right and the ability to speak the consummating verdict over our lives.

But the problem is, from almost the very start of humanity, something went wrong.

We rejected God's place as our rightful maker and judge. We disobeyed God. We rejected him. And we lost our righteousness. We lost our right standing before him.

[ 9 : 39 ] And now we're out of joint, not just with God, but with ourselves and with one another. And we can't erase the fact that our life matters and that verdicts matter. So we go about trying to build a righteous record before the judges of our own making.

And we work really, really hard to please someone or something into thinking that we've done what it takes to be right, to be acceptable, to be approved, to be worthy, to be whole.

Here's what I'm saying. How can I be right with God? That is your and my ultimate concern. What could possibly be more important than where you stand with God?

But even if you don't think that is, your life is still being driven by the need and the longing to be justified, to be pronounced in the right. And the only one who can really pass the sentence that will settle things deep in your soul is the one who made you that way in the first place.

God himself. And the question is, what will be your case before him? What will you hold up as your righteousness before your maker?

[ 10 : 57 ] Well, God, I worked hard. Or I did a lot of great things for the poor. Or I kept all the rules and went to church. Or I had the right theological persuasion.

In the context of our passage this morning, we see that some people were trying to hold up their Jewish cultural identity as the thing that would bring God's favorable verdict. They were essentially saying, unless you become Jewish and abide by the ceremonial laws and customs, you can't be right before God.

And notice something very important about their position. They also believed that Jesus was the Messiah. They taught that you should acknowledge him as such. They weren't denying that. But what they were saying was that in addition to Jesus, a person needed to take on certain practices and customs of the law to be fully accepted.

Just a little addition, that's all. And when a group of these guys came to Antioch, they were able to exert enough pressure so that even Barnabas and Peter feared crossing them. Greg talked about this last week.

So a big schism starts ripping through the church in Antioch. Jews stop eating with Gentiles because according to the ceremonial law, that's a no-no. Gentiles are unclean and to eat with a Gentile would make you unclean.

[ 12 : 09 ] And Paul watches as Peter stops eating with the Gentiles. And then the rest of the Jewish Christians stop eating with the Gentiles. Finally, even Barnabas himself pulls back.

Now in verse 14, and probably extending the whole way to verse 21 in chapter 2, we have a summary, a praises, of what Paul says to Peter in light of all of this.

Let's pick up in verse 15. Imagine Paul standing up in the congregation and saying this to Peter. We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.

yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

We know, Paul says, this is the truth we hold in common, Peter. Yes, we're Jews. Yes, we kept the law as best we could. But we know that a person isn't justified that way.

[ 13 : 14 ] In verse 16, Paul's going to repeat it three times for emphasis, not by works of the law. Sometimes we need to have things hammered home, don't we?

And Paul does some good hammering in this passage. And that's good. I've actually been listening to a series of talks on Galatians by an old London minister named Dick Lucas who has a great, thick, London-British accent.

And in his sermons on this passage, he says, I wish I could sort of imitate his accent, but I will spare you. He says, if you took a survey of people today, then probably 90% of them would operate with this mindset that it's on the basis of their works that they'll be accepted by God.

And then he kind of draws back a little bit and he says, well, you know, I'm not actually sure about that number. I could be wrong. It could probably be like 95% or more. But the point is this, friends.

The average person on the street and the average person in your office and the average person in the pew next to you and that person whom you call I, all of us, we all have this in common, that we are constantly tempted to think that it's my works that will justify me.

[ 14 : 36 ] Of course, that takes a thousand different forms. You don't have to imagine Paul's opponents in Galatians as full-fledged Pelagians who are telling everybody to pull themselves up by their bootstraps and grit their teeth and try to accumulate as much moral merit as possible.

They're probably not like that. They probably had some things to say about grace and forgiveness. It's just like many people today, many Christians. Ah, they think it's a mix, right?

God gives you some grace and you put in some works and together, according to this Grace Plus Works cocktail record, God will justify you. Maybe. Hopefully.

We'll see. Everybody can spot a hardcore legalist from a mile away, right? But it's the soft legalism. It's the semi-Pelagianism.

It's the grace plus works in all its thousand shapes and colors. That's the deceptive one. That's the deadly one because that's the one that sounds a lot like the gospel.

[ 15 : 40 ] There's forgiveness. There's grace. There's Jesus. But creeping into the backseat is your own merit. But you see, it doesn't stay in the backseat for very long.

It moves to the middle of the backseat. And then it starts giving a little direction here and there. And then it moves into the passenger seat. Oh, there's still grace. There's still forgiveness. There's still Jesus.

Oh, yes. But after a while, finally your human merit creeps all the way into the driver's seat. And then that's the thing that's determining where you're headed. That's the thing defining who's in and who's out.

That's the thing defining your standing before God. In Galatians, it was circumcision. It was a ceremonial law. For some churches, it's baptism.

For other churches, it's speaking in tongues. For the typical person on the street, it's probably that vague concept called living a good life. But no matter what it is, we are told here in no uncertain terms.

[ 16 : 41 ] It will not and it cannot justify you. Well, why not? Right?

Why don't works of the law actually work? Why won't God accept us according to our good works? Didn't God give us the law in the first place? If we keep God's law, shouldn't that do the trick?

But that's just it, you see. We can't keep the law. Think about something as simple as the golden rule. Most people think that's a good idea, right? Most of the time.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you. Love your neighbor as yourself. Now, as I thought about this week, I could list a hundred things I did for myself or at least I thought I would like to do for myself this week.

Books I'd like to buy. Meals I'd like to eat. Places I'd like to visit. Long hot showers I'd like to take while Beth watches the kids.

[ 17 : 41 ] But you know what I did for my neighbor this week? I said hi to her as we passed in the entryway to our apartment building. That's it.

Now you might be thinking, well, that's because you're a selfish cad. I was really nice to my neighbor this week. But think about it. Do you really love them as you love yourself? Do you put the same amount of time and creativity and energy and passion and money into loving your neighbor as you did into loving yourself?

Of course not. Of course not. You break the golden rule every day, miserably. You don't keep God's law. Not even close.

And neither do I. And that's why no one will be justified by works of the law. And that puts us in a very uncomfortable position. Because we're hungry for a justifying verdict.

And that's written all over our lives and all over our psyches in a thousand different ways. And we've seen that there's only one verdict that truly matters. The verdict of God. And now we've seen that we've been told that there's nothing we can do that could possibly get God's verdict to be cast in our favor.

[ 18 : 58 ] You see, when we really come to grips with God's law, we see that we don't deserve justification but the exact opposite. We deserve condemnation. We haven't loved our neighbors as ourselves.

We haven't loved God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength. We've spent more time excusing our moral failures than actually doing what God says. And here's the most troubling thing. What about all the sin we've already committed? What about the time you lusted after that woman crossing the street? What about the time you nursed that bitterness and unforgiveness in your heart?

What about the time you fudged on your tax return? The time you lashed out in your kids at anger? The time you made fun of that kid in homeroom just because of the clothes he was wearing?

And somehow we got this silly idea that somehow before God our good deeds are going to outweigh our bad deeds and make them all okay.

[ 20 : 03 ] Imagine standing before a judge and saying yeah I did rob the bank on Thursday afternoon but you know Friday morning I helped an old lady cross the street. Does that erase the fact that you robbed the bank?

That you broke the law? That you ought to be sentenced for what you've done? Not at all. You're still liable to pay the penalty for that crime no matter how much good you've been doing in the meantime.

And the fact of the matter is friends that these moments in our lives these reprehensible moments keep piling up one on top of the other with nothing to pay them down.

think about it. God graciously gives you life and breath every single second of your day.

He's given you every good thing you and I have. Our talents our upbringing our work our schooling our family He's kept us from harm and preserved our existence up to this very moment.

[ 21 : 03 ] We owe utterly everything to God right now. the only thing that doesn't stop us from slipping into utter non-being is the gracious will of God.

And what have you done with your life to even thank Him to praise Him to honor Him Imagine that your every thought word and deed were captured in a photograph and hung up covering the walls of this church and up the pillars and along the ceiling your whole life on display for all of us to see for most of us for all of us that would be an embarrassing thought.

Would it not? And yet the eternal God sees every moment of your life simultaneously just like that.

Don't get me wrong friends I'm not trying to be manipulative or melodramatic this morning far from it I'm just trying to get us to see reality you won't be justified by your works in fact just the opposite your works will condemn you and you know this that's why your face would turn beet red if this room suddenly put your life on display and that's why you would run out in shame and yet though we deserve condemnation before the law there is a way for us to be declared righteous there is a way through Jesus Christ came and lived the perfect life of obedience to God's law and in his death he received the very condemnation that our sins deserved every misdeed that we hadn't paid was paid he was sentenced he was exposed he was shamed on the cross for all those who would believe in him in 2nd Corinthians

Paul says God made him who knew no sin to be sin for us so that in him we could be the righteousness of God what hope do we have of being justified before God no hope in ourselves but every hope in Christ a person's not justified by works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus through faith in Christ God pronounces sinners to be righteous and accepted and approved all on the basis of what Christ has done on his perfect record and on his sin bearing death through faith we're united with the one who's made a way and who's been pronounced righteous so that we can too but now faith is very misunderstood is it not what is faith seems to be a pretty important concept here what is it what does it mean to have faith in Christ you know the old theologians used to talk about faith involving three things knowledge assent and trust first it involves knowledge and intellect faith has content there are certain things you believe as opposed to other things but second faith also involves assent you acknowledge that content to be true but third faith goes a step further from not just merely assent but to trust you personally put your weight into the thing you give your allegiance to it you put your destiny in its hands

I think it was Spurgeon who once told the story of a tightrope walker named Charles Blondin who performed over Niagara Falls the distance the distance of his rope was eleven hundred feet and each time Blondin crossed he did something a little more spectacular the first time he walked across just using a balance beam and then he ran across and then he did it blindfolded and then he did it on a bicycle one time apparently he took a wheelbarrow across with a little tiny stove stopped in the middle cooked an omelet and ate it on the middle of the rope of course the crowds loved it and his manager loved it too Harry Colcourt loved it it was a sheer money maker but one day Blondin returned turned to Harry and said to him I want you to let me carry you across now put yourself in Harry's shoes he knew he could do it right the guy made an omelet in the middle of a rope and ate it he's got it covered but would he trust him would he put himself in the arms of his friend and cross the deep well according to that source of all things true wikipedia he did

[ 26 : 21 ] Blondin crossed Niagara Falls with Harry Concord on his back and they both live happily ever after now of course you see the connection right faith in Jesus Christ is not merely knowledge Christians believe that Jesus died for sinners faith in Jesus Christ is not merely assent Jesus really and truly did die for sinners saving faith in Christ is knowledge assent and trust Jesus died for me and I cling to him as my only hope can you say that this morning as we think about faith we have to

ask too I mean haven't we just sort of brought works in the back door isn't faith kind of like a work I mean is faith the new work but no not at all you see you see faith is more like the anti-work when you really get it there's nothing meritorious in your trust it's simply instrumental the old hymn used to say nothing in my hands

I bring simply to the cross I claim God doesn't look upon our act of believing and say oh that's what I've been waiting for this whole time that would make faith just another work no the father looks at his son Jesus with infinite favor and faith puts you into union with the son and so a recipient of that favor your faith doesn't save you Jesus does think of Blondin and Harry crossing Niagara what took Harry across the deep what brought him safely to the other side it wasn't his faith it was his friend now I realize that I'm threading a needle here but it's a very important point I think one of the greatest tragedies would be if our church became a place where we thought that our faith and our act of believing was what saved us why because without a doubt we would become a pride a proudful and self righteous place and God would be deeply disowned ask yourself do I look at non-Christians with disdain because they don't believe do you think to yourself well at least I've been smart enough and spiritual enough to realize that I have to have faith in Christ dummy friend if that's you you are in danger you need to repent even of your so called faith and flee to Christ looking at your faith to save you is like looking at a telescope and thinking you've seen the stars you are not only a fool but you've never truly seen the dark of your own sin and the brilliant majesty of Jesus Christ shining like a million stars saving faith always looks outside of itself to Christ and the person with saving faith you see always has a sneaking suspicion that even faith itself is a gift of God's grace and that doesn't make you proud or disdainful but humble and grateful so friends here's the very heart of the gospel justification justification

John Stott goes so far as to say in his commentary on Galatians nobody has understood Christianity who does not understand this word justification is the declarative act whereby God pronounces us righteous and acceptable in his sight not by virtue of our own works but solely on the basis of Christ's righteousness received through faith alone though you are a sinner through faith in Christ you are reckoned right you are declared right and as we look at the rest of our passage this morning what that means is that you have a whole new identity a whole new life that's what Paul's after in the rest of the passage look at what Paul says in verse 17 before we get to the hypothetical question look at the premise right in the middle cut off the beginning and the end and look at the middle in our endeavor to be justified in

Christ we too were found to be sinners justified sinners if you are a Christian that's what you are a justified sinner or to use Luther's famous phrase at the same time just and sinful imagine I was a failed business owner I probably would be a failed business owner if I tried but just imagine I tried to make you know I tried my best to make my business work but my accounting skills were bad and my people skills were abysmal and I had no sense of how to actually close a deal and so my business lost everything reputation money home the whole thing but then imagine that I had a very successful very accomplished friend who ran a fortune 500 company and was very rich but didn't have a family of his own and imagine this friend writes me into his will as a full inheritor of his estate just because he loves me well suddenly

[ 32 : 06 ] I become a very rich man have I not of course in and of myself I'm still a total failure at running a business but my status now in my friend is as a very accomplished and very wealthy man and it's all come to me as a gift it's all credited to me and you might look at me and call me a wealthy failure or an affluent flop it's similar with Christ friends we are utterly approved moral failures simul justus et peccator justified sinners that's hard to wrap your mind around I know but how do you know you're really starting to grasp the magnitude of that how do you know that's really starting to hit home as your new identity first when you start to see a strange thing happening in your life you start to see on the one hand that you're much more humble than you used to be you don't look down your nose at other people like you used to after all you're a sinner right you're a failure you're saved by sheer grace you don't deserve a lick of what you got notice that

Paul says we too have been found to be sinners meaning good Jews like he and Peter in the context we too even good people who grew up in the church we too are sinners and that makes us much more humble and gentle than we ever used to be and at the same time you find yourself being quite outgoing quite courageous quite bold because after all you're righteous in God's sight he's declared you to be utterly acceptable to him and that gives you a confidence and a boldness like you never knew before so this totally new dynamic starts to be at work in your heart and in your

life suddenly you're humble and bold you're gentle and confident have you seen that at work in your life but there's another way you know that your identity as a justified sinner is starting to sink in it's when verse 17 starts to seem like a pretty good question and you find yourself asking the same thing if in our endeavor to be justified in

Christ we too are found to be sinners is Christ a servant of sin in other words does Christ just let us do whatever we want Paul's raising an objection in this verse that always arises whenever he expounds the doctrine of justification and it goes something like this if God accepts you wholly apart from works well then you won't have any motivation to do good works right Christ will just become a license to sin if God's going to love and accept and cherish you totally apart from what you've done and completely in accordance with Christ well then you can do whatever you want and that can't be right now if that thought crosses your mind when you hear the truth of justification explained that's a good thing it means you're really starting to get how utterly gracious the gospel is and how our works play zero role in our status before God but of course the whole objection misses the point doesn't it because it doesn't understand the connection between justification and identity between righteousness and life these verses are very complex you're probably looking over them thinking what in the world do these mean but I think what's going on here is that

Paul is answering this objection in a twofold way first he's going to deconstruct our legalistic motivation and second he's going to display what true gospel motivation looks like now we're going to move fast through these verses but don't worry we're going to come back to these themes again and again and again as we move through the rest of the book in verses 18 through 19 Paul deconstructs that legalistic motivation in a nutshell here's what he's saying if I can try to paraphrase it legalism can never lead to life at least not a life lived to God you see the premise behind this objection that Paul's talking about is this well the law is actually the best motivator to live a good life in other words if you think you have to be obedient for God to accept you you'll actually do what he says but in verse 18 Paul starts to break that down a little bit speaking of the law he says if I rebuild what I tore down I just prove myself to be a transgressor in other words if I go back to the law to try start trying to justify myself the very thing that the gospel of grace brought down if

I go back to the law I'm just going to become a lawbreaker now that's a pretty provocative and maybe even paradoxical statement at first isn't it going back to the law makes me a lawbreaker how are we supposed to understand that well verse 19 shows us how through the law I died to the law so that I might live to God look at the symmetry between these two verses if I rebuild the law I'm a transgressor if I die to the law I live to God what Paul is saying here is that using the law as a means of justifying himself using the law as a means of motivating himself only took him further and further away from God so far away in fact that he had to die to the law in order to really start living for God why because when he was living for the law he wasn't living for God he was living for himself here's what I mean you can do a lot of nice things for someone because you genuinely care for them yeah or you can do a lot of nice things for someone because you hope they write you into their will in the latter case are you living for them or are you living for yourself your actions look identical but in reality it's completely different this side of the gospel Paul realized that he wasn't following the law because he loved God but because he was trying to get

[ 38 : 16 ] God into his pocket and reward him and that's the deadly thing about legalism you think you're serving God but you're actually serving yourself you're just trying to get things from God through your own self-righteous deeds but through the law I died to the law Paul says the law itself shows me through its infinite demands that I can't keep the law well enough to win God's favor the law's always pointed me away from myself and away from itself to a savior legalism can't lead to life but Paul goes on in the rest of the passage to display true gospel motivations being a justified sinner means having a whole new life and that life is wrapped up in the crucified and risen Jesus three times Paul mentions the death of Christ in this short passage the beginning of verse 20 look I've been crucified with Christ there it is the end of 20 the son of God loved me and gave himself for me verse 21 Christ died now very interestingly take those occurrences in reverse order first then verse 21 what we have is a general truth yeah we can maybe rephrase it like this Jesus died a meaningful purposeful death on the cross to do what the law couldn't do justify sinners but then the general becomes personal

Jesus loved me and gave himself on the cross for me but then the personal becomes transformational I have been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me so you see when the gospel really hits home your I yourself your identity is utterly reconfigured it

dies and comes to life again when a person becomes a Christian Jesus Christ by his spirit indwells the believer and they're utterly changed old desires and longings are put to death new desires and longings come to life and all this flows from our faith union with Jesus the great lover of our souls now is this dying and rising a subjective experience or is an objective reality well it's both of course it's objective it's true whether you feel it or not if you're in Christ the old has gone the new has come anyone in Christ is a new creation but because it's objectively the case then subjectively experientially it begins to work itself out from the inside out you see if we've been justified by faith in Christ then we're also going to be transformed by faith in Christ we live by faith

Paul says Christ's alien righteousness the righteousness that comes to us from outside that's credited to us is going to have an effect on your actual sin how so because the reason we sin in the first place is because we're seeking an alternate form of righteousness apart from Christ no one ever does bad things simply for the sake of doing bad things right it's always in the service of some other end and that end is always a misplaced distorted attempt to get a righteous standing a sense of rightness or wholeness or peace apart from Christ take sex I know it's getting late let's talk about sex now the biblical principle is quite straightforward isn't it sex is only permissible inside a permanent lifelong commitment to a person of the opposite sex in other words no sex outside of marriage we don't have all the time this morning to get into the whys of that but there it is that's the principle that's the way

God designed healthy sexuality to work but the real question is if you're a Christian and you believe that how come some of you here this morning are still having sex outside of marriage what is it that sex is giving you what are you getting out of it sex is never just about the sex is it maybe you can't imagine what life would be like without the approval and acceptance of your boyfriend maybe it gives you a sense of power and makes you feel in control maybe the pleasure and the risk make you feel alive and important and whole and I can stand up here as your friend and as your pastor and I can tell you stop until I'm blue in the face and I can tell you all the bad consequences it will have but you won't stop until you realize what's going on underneath your sin until you realize that underneath it there's an attempt to find some kind of righteousness some kind of rightness or wholeness some kind of life granting verdict apart from Christ but if you see that and you repent of it and turn to Christ and you see that he's your righteousness and in him you have everything you need to be accepted and whole and safe before God then you won't have to use sex anymore to try to get it you can finally let sex just be sex in its right place and time how about money while we're on topics that people like to talk about right again the biblical principle is that we ought to be sacrificially generous with our income we ought to be giving at such a rate that our lifestyle is impacted pretty visibly we ought to care about justice and the poor and give radically to meet the need but that's not how most Christians in America live is that how we live and again

I can rail against greed and I can tell you how it will destroy your soul and I can talk about all the great things that generosity will do for you and for the kingdom but until we uncover the reason why we won't part with our money we'll never be able to give like the Bible says we should give until you realize that money is your means to security and comfort or that it's the means to please your family and get their love until you uncover that place where Christ's righteousness hasn't really become your all in all then you won't give but when you realize that the riches of his righteousness have been poured over you when you realize that his verdict means a place in God's eternal kingdom when you realize that because you're in Christ now you are infinitely rich towards God the wellspring opens and money will just be money and you'll be able to use it and give it away and experience the joy of generosity so as we wrap up this morning ask yourself these three questions that come at us from verses 20 and 21 is the justifying death of Christ true is it personal and is it transformational in my life for some of you today maybe you're just not sure it's true maybe what we've been talking about this morning seems confusing or remote maybe you have questions about the content that just don't make sense let me encourage you to seek this out if the gospel's true it will change your life and verse 21 actually will give you one good guide in that search one good question to guide you did Christ die for no purpose was it in vain is my moral performance enough to heal my relationship with God or is something greater needed in my place don't stop searching until you find out whether that's true read the accounts of Jesus' life in the gospels talk to a Christian friend grab a couple books off the bookstall downstairs steal them

[ 47 : 19 ] I don't care we're practically giving them away anyway friends the stakes are too high to just let it slip by is it true for others of you maybe you're starting to believe it's true maybe you've been hanging around Christians maybe you've been reading the Bible maybe it's starting to sound

pretty plausible or maybe you've believed in your head it's true for a long time but let me ask you is it personal can you say he loved me and gave himself for me are you on the threshold between assent and trust John Wesley after reading the end of the second chapter of Luther's commentary on Galatians wrote I labored and waited and prayed to feel who loved me and gave himself for me don't let this verse go until you have a breakthrough but at the same time let me advise you this morning not to wait forever for a feeling do you know that he died do you believe that it's true then cling to him in faith and trust the word written here as his very word to you he loves you and he gave himself for you take hold of him by faith put your trust in him to carry you over the deep finally for others maybe you're there maybe the pennies dropped and you say in your heart yes he did it for me for my sins for my salvation he loved me if that's you then let me ask have you begun to work that truth down into your heart and so be transformed are you taking every area of your life and saying

I've been crucified with Christ it's no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me are you trying to change by banging your head against the law instead prayerfully apply the righteousness of Christ to your life and see how he changes your very motivations from the inside out of course you're going to need help doing that share your burdens with a brother or sister ask them to pray specifically for the area where you want to see your old self die and your new self come alive is it true is it personal is it transformational don't stop friends until Christ is all three let's pray Lord I pray for my friends who are gathered here this morning

Lord and I ask that by your spirit you would meet each one where they're at God would you help them to take steps of faith towards you God for those who aren't sure whether it's true help them to see it in all its clarity and brilliance Lord for those who haven't had the sense that it's for me Christ would you come and speak to their hearts and Lord for all of us who long to be changed who long to say I've been crucified with you Lord Jesus live in me I'm living by faith in you Lord would you work it out in our lives would we be a people that when others look at us they see Christ living in us and through us we pray it in your name Jesus Amen  
God's