

## 20260308 Doctrine of justification by faith – Ps Bijoy

Last Sunday we started our series on Galatians. This week we are looking at chapter 2, especially verses 15 to 21. Here Paul makes a statement about the doctrine of justification, which explains the true gospel's view of faith and the law. Paul unfolds this great core doctrine of justification by faith alone.

Verses 15-16

“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is 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 observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified” (Galatians 2:15-16).

Justification by faith is the chief doctrine of the Christian faith. It is so important that if you do not understand this doctrine, you really don't understand Christianity at all. You could be right about many other doctrines such as the deity of Christ, the Trinity, and the Second Coming of Christ, but if you are wrong on this doctrine, you are wrong at the very center of the Christian faith and no amount of being right elsewhere can make up for being wrong at the center.

Galatians 2:16 “know (εἰδότες/*Eidotes*; It refers to a settled conviction) that a person (*ou dikaioutai anthrōpos*: No human/person is justified/declared righteous) is not justified by the works of 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, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

This is one of the most important verses in the New Testament. If you read it slowly and carefully, you will discover that several words are repeated. Paul mentions “faith” three times, “justified” three times, and “law” three times. In fact, this verse, which is packed with dense theological truth, actually says the same thing three times.

The word “justify” means to “declare righteous.” It refers to a verdict from the judge that allows a defendant to go free. It means that the defendant is declared not guilty, innocent of all charges, and there is no record against him in the eyes of the law. If you are justified, your record is clean and clear and you are free to go. To be justified is the opposite of being condemned. If you apply that truth in the spiritual realm, it looks like this: Justification is that act of God whereby he acquits guilty sinners (that is, he declares them innocent), on the basis of the death of Christ. This gift of justification is received

solely on the basis of faith wholly apart from good works of any kind. Justified sinners are thus pardoned, set free, accepted by God, and treated as righteous.

When God justifies a sinner, he doesn't simply delay his punishment. And he doesn't reduce his punishment. When God justifies a sinner, he removes the punishment altogether. That is why Romans 8:1 says there is "no condemnation" for those who are in Christ Jesus. Justification means the sinner is declared "not guilty" in the eyes of God because God credits (accounts or imputes) to him the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ. That's a pure miracle of God's grace. Guilty sinners are forgiven, pardoned, and declared righteous while they are still guilty, on the basis of Christ's death on the cross. And this amazing gift comes to anyone who will receive it by faith without trying to work for it.

In verse 16, three times says that we are not justified by the works of the law. That means there is nothing we can do to save ourselves or help save ourselves. The Judaizers did not believe this. You've got to keep the law, especially the law about circumcision, in order to be saved. Their list also included the Ten Commandments. And it logically would have to include all the other commands of the law. If you keep one, you've got to keep them all. Once you've started down the law-keeping road, it's too late to start picking and choosing which commands you're going to obey.

This false hope of going to heaven by our good works is the religion of the man. It's flattering to feel that you contribute something to your own salvation. Just try harder and you'll make it in the end. As John Stott points out, this "fearful delusion is a lie of the devil." It can't be done. In the end the gap between us and God is too great. At best we can only keep part of the law part of the time. No one keeps all the law all the time.

God demands perfection. That's a shocking thought. Because we live in an imperfect world, the very idea of perfection is hard to grasp. If you ask people, "Do you have to be perfect to go to heaven?" most will answer no. But the answer is yes. God is perfect and he will not allow imperfect people to join him in heaven. If you want to go to heaven, you've got to be perfect from the moment of birth till the moment of death with no failure at all in between. God's standard is absolute perfection in thought, word and deed all the time.

But someone might say, "I can't change the past but I can be perfect from here on out. Won't that be enough?" First of all, you couldn't do it even if you tried, and even if you could, it wouldn't work. Future

obedience cannot overcome past disobedience. You can never do enough in the future to cover what you did in the past.

The result of living by the law is guaranteed frustration. The harder we try, the more we fail.

At this point we encounter the only other option: By faith in the finished work of Christ. Christ was perfect in our place. He succeeded where we failed. He obeyed where we disobeyed. He was perfect where we sinned repeatedly. He completely kept God's law and fulfilled all its demands. Therefore, he is able to die as a perfect substitute, in our place, taking our punishment, bearing our sins, dying the death we should have died. When we trust him as Savior, God declares us righteous, justified, pardoned, and forgiven. Salvation is a free gift of God received by faith.

Verses 17-19

"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! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God" (Galatians 2:17-19).

In verse 19 Paul offers a simple contrast that explains the heart of biblical salvation. Next week Larry will explore further into this section as he preaches from chapter 3. If ever a man tried to be saved by keeping the law, it was Paul. Philippians 3 tells us how hard he worked to earn God's favour. He was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," a trained Pharisee, a learned doctor of the law, and a man zealous to keep every commandment so that he might earn God's favour. He was far beyond his contemporaries in terms of outward obedience. If salvation came by keeping the rules, Paul had it made. He was going to heaven for sure. Then he met Christ and everything changed. Once Christ transformed his life, he looked back at his self-righteous law keeping and concluded that it was dung (not Ps Bijoy's language but Paul's, *skubalon* : dung, garbage) compared with the joy of knowing Christ personally. All those things he tried to do to commend himself to God utterly failed. They failed not because they were bad but because they could not change his heart. Outward obedience can never change human nature. Paul needed something the law could not provide, he needed a new heart. The law put him to death in the sense that it left him utterly condemned and guilty in the eyes of God. It proved him to be a sinner, but it could not provide new life.

There is a sense in which all of us must eventually admit that we are truly sinners. It's healthy to admit your sins, especially if that admission drives you to the cross of Christ for forgiveness.

Alive to God through faith

What the law could not do, Christ has done for us. Rule keeping produces guilt and leaves us dead in the road. But when Christ enters, we find new life. To be alive to God means that we no longer live for self but instead we live for God's glory. Once you come to Christ, you're a brand-new person (yet continuously growing in the image of Christ through the process of sanctification). You may still struggle to go back to the old person you used to be. But someone (Holy Spirit) will convict you. You won't be happy to dwell there. You won't be satisfied.

Verse 20-21

The closing verses of our text show us the difference Christ makes to those who believe in him.

A. We live by Faith in the Son of God, verse 20

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

This is one of the most famous and most loved verses in the Bible. The words are clear and simple but the meaning is not easy to understand. When Paul says, "I have been crucified with Christ," what does he mean? He doesn't mean that he was literally crucified when Christ was crucified. He wasn't even in Jerusalem when Jesus was crucified. But if it's not a literal crucifixion, what is it?

When we come to Christ by faith, we are joined with him in a supernatural spiritual union (theosis) that is so strong and so real that what happened to Christ 2000 years ago also happened to us. We might say it this way:

When Christ died, I died, when Christ arose, I arose with Him.

There is also a supernatural side to this that is hard to put in words. Those who know Christ personally understand what it means to say that "Christ lives in me" even if we can't fully explain it to anyone else. This is both an objective truth (what he did, he did for us so that we can say that we also died and rose from the dead) and an ongoing subjective spiritual reality (our daily experience with Christ)

Is dwelling in you? Does he live in you? We experience Christ in us only as we commit ourselves to him as Lord and Savior.