

## **THE BIBLICAL DOCTRINE OF JUSTIFICATION**

**Galatians 2:11-21**

**By Andy Manning**

### **I. INTRODUCTION**

1. 2017 marked the 500<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Protestant Reformation. If you are a Christian and you are not a Roman Catholic or a Greek Orthodox, then you are a protestant. You are a child of the Reformation. And that all started in 1517, with a man named Martin Luther, a Catholic Monk who first set out to reform the Catholic church. When his efforts were rejected, he started his own church, and then later many other protestant denominations were birthed. What was the Protestant Reformation all about? A few weeks ago I mentioned the five solas of the Reformation: Faith alone, grace alone, Christ alone, Scripture alone, and to the glory of God alone. Perhaps an easier way to summarize the Protestant Reformation is with one word: Justification. The Protestant Reformation was all about the doctrine of justification. RC Sproul called it “the cardinal doctrine of the Protestant Reformation.” The Puritan Thomas Watson called justification the very hinge and pillar of Christianity. He said, “An error about justification is dangerous, like a defect in a foundation.” Today we’re going to learn what it means.

### **II. CONTEXT**

1. Let’s remember the context of Galatians. After Paul started the churches there, false teachers came behind him and said that it was not enough to believe in Jesus for salvation; one also had to become Jewish. In response, Paul wrote this letter.

### **III. TEXT: Galatians 2:11-21**

*11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. 12 For he regularly ate with the Gentiles before certain men came from James. However, when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, because he feared those from the circumcision party. 13 Then the rest of the Jews joined his hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel, I told Cephas in front of everyone, “If you, who are a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?”*

*15 We are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners,” 16 and yet because we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus. This was so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified. 17 But if we ourselves are also found to be “sinners” while seeking to be justified by Christ, is Christ then a promoter, of sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild those things that I tore down, I show myself to be a lawbreaker. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son*

*of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.*

#### IV. EXPLANATION

1. Paul is defending the doctrine of salvation by faith alone. And he used the apostle Peter as an example. Peter knew that Gentiles didn't have to become Jewish to be saved. He was given a vision in Acts 10 with this meaning, and then he preached the gospel to a Gentile named Cornelius and saw him and his entire family get saved without becoming Jewish. Later, Peter went to visit the church in Antioch, where Paul was. Peter was eating with Gentiles (non-kosher food), affirming that Jewish dietary laws were no longer important. But when some Jewish men arrived from Jerusalem, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles and started only eating with the Jews (kosher food). By his actions Peter communicated that the Gentiles did need to become Jewish. Paul called him out on his hypocrisy. Then Paul went on to explain that we are justified not by following the law, but by faith in Christ.
2. In this passage we can find four facts about justification.

#### V. FACTS ABOUT JUSTIFICATION

##### 1. Justification is man's greatest need.

- i. The topic of justification is the reason Paul wrote this letter. The topic of justification led to a dispute between the apostles Paul and Peter. The word is mentioned three times in this passage. The implication is that it is a big deal.
- ii. It is in fact man's greatest need.
- iii. The Bible teaches that a day is coming in which God will judge and punish all who break His laws. Jesus will in fact be the judge. All lawbreakers will be thrown into hell, the lake of fire. The righteous will be allowed into heaven. In other words, one day you will face the judgment seat of God, and He will either declare you righteous or guilty. This is what justification is all about.
- iv. Justification one of the words the Bible uses to describe salvation from sin. Salvation is described in many ways in the Bible – adoption, redemption, reconciliation, sanctification, glorification, justification, etc.
- v. **Definition:** To be justified means that on judgment day God declares you righteous and allows you into heaven.
- vi. The Greek word "justify" (Gk. *dikaioo*) means to declare righteous. It is a forensic, or legal term that refers to a judge declaring a person righteous, not guilty. The opposite of justification is condemnation.
- vii. **Jl Packer, *Knowing God*, 167.** "[To be justified means to be] acquitted, accepted, reinstated, set right with God."
- viii. Man's ultimate need is to be justified on judgment day. Man's ultimate question is how to be justified on judgment day.
- ix. **Jl Packer, *Knowing God*, 187** "Justification -- by which we mean God's forgiveness of the past together with His acceptance for the future -- is the

primary and fundamental blessing of the gospel is not in question. Justification is the primary blessing, because it meets our primary spiritual need. We all stand by nature under God's judgment; His law condemns us; guilt gnaws at us, making us restless, miserable, and in our lucid moments afraid; we have no peace in ourselves, because we have no peace with our Maker. So we need the forgiveness of our sins, and assurance of a restored relationship with God more than we need anything else in the world; and this the gospel offers us before it offers us anything else."

## **2. Justification can be found.**

- i. The Bible says that all lawbreakers will be condemned and sent to hell, and only those who are righteous will go to heaven.
- ii. There's a big problem with that. No one is righteous. We are all sinners. We have all broken God's laws.
- iii. Let me put it this way. On the one hand, God is a righteous judge, and He cannot allow sin to go unpunished. On the other hand, we are sinners deserving of punishment.
- iv. So while justification is man's greatest need, it is also man's greatest problem.
- v. **William Hendriksen** "Neither poverty nor disease nor pain nor imprisonment is man's most bitter woe. To remove any or all of these is not his most pressing need. His unbearable curse is the fact that by nature he is a child of wrath (Eph 2:3). He has no peace (Is 48:22) but only a terrifying expectation of judgment (Heb 10:27), so that he cannot even fully enjoy the natural blessings which God bestows upon him. What he needs more than anything else is to have his guilt removed. 'How can man be just with God?' is the question is which he must have an answer."
- vi. Is it possible to be justified before God? Is it possible to be accepted by God?
- vii. The good news is that this passage implies that justification is possible, and it even tells us how to be justified.
- viii. **Galatians 2:16** "... [W]e know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ."
- ix. Even though we are lawbreakers, there is a way to be justified. There is a way to be counted worthy. There is a way to be declared righteous. And Paul explains it in this passage.
- x. That's good news! That's why the Bible calls it the gospel, which means good news.
- xi. Some people complain about the doctrine of hell – that God sends some people to hell. The good news is that nobody has to go to hell, because God has provided a way for us to be justified before Him.

## **3. Justification is not by the works of the law.**

- i. **Galatians 2:16** "... [W]e know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... because by the works of the law no human will be justified."
- ii. What does Paul mean by works of the law? Law-keeping. Personal righteousness. You can not get into heaven by being good enough. Why not? Obviously, if you were perfectly righteous, then God would have to declare you righteous and let you into heaven. But nobody is righteous. Nobody is sinless.
- iii. **Romans 3:10** "As it is written: There is no one righteous, not even one."
- iv. It's not that the law is bad, or worthless. It's not that law-keeping is pointless. It's that law-keeping is impossible. We have all failed. We have broken the law. We are lawbreakers. And that includes everyone except Jesus Christ.
- v. Let's look at Paul's full argument in Galatians 2:15-16.
- vi. **Galatians 2:15-16** 15 We are Jews by birth and not "Gentile sinners," 16 and yet because we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus. This was so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified.
  - 1. The Jews considered Gentiles to be sinners because they did not have God's fully revealed law, and therefore were constantly breaking it.
  - 2. Paul said, "Even though we aren't Gentile sinners, as Jews, speaking of himself and Peter, even we don't rely on the law for salvation, because we know it is impossible. Instead, we put our faith in Christ for justification."
- vii. Roman Catholics theology teaches the opposite of this. They teach that salvation is by the works of the law. When you get baptized, you experience initial justification, or acceptance into heaven. However, to get into heaven you must live a perfectly righteous life. If you die with any sin in your life, you will not go to heaven. Instead, you will go to purgatory, where you will spend time purging or purifying your soul and becoming righteous enough for heaven. This can take a year, or a million years. Who knows? When you have achieved actual righteousness, then God will justify you and grant you access to heaven. So then, access to heaven is made possible and available by Jesus, but it must then be earned by living a holy life.
- viii. In opposition, the protestant reformers quoted Paul and said, "We know that a person is not justified by the works of the law." We are not justified by being righteous; by keeping the law; by being good.
- ix. (They also pointed out that the Bible doesn't teach the doctrine of purgatory. But we'll save that for later.)

- x. Salvation/justification is not by works. This is what it means that salvation is by grace. Grace means “free gift.” That’s a positive way of saying that salvation is not by works.
- xi. This is stated many times in Scripture.
- xii. **Ephesians 2:8-9** “For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God’s gift—9 not from works, so that no one can boast.”
- xiii. We are not saved by works; by being righteous; by keeping the law.
- xiv. **Titus 2:5** “he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy.”
- xv. Paul is very clear on this point throughout Galatians. Since we cannot be justified through law-works, then those who try to be saved through law-works are cursed!
  - 1. **Galatians 3:10** “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, because it is written, Everyone who does not do everything written in the book of the law is cursed.”
    - a. You are under a curse – destined for damnation – if you rely on the law for salvation. Why? Because if you are relying on the law, you have keep it perfectly, and nobody can do that!
  - 2. **Galatians 5:4** “You who are trying to be justified by the law are alienated from Christ; you have fallen from grace.”
    - a. You can either try to earn salvation and fail; and be alienated from Christ; or your can accept it as a free gift.

#### 4. Justification is by faith in Jesus Christ.

- i. You can’t be justified by works – by being righteous – because nobody is righteous. So how can we be justified/declared righteous, and be found worthy of heaven?
- ii. **Galatians 2:16** “and yet because we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus. This was so that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no human being will be justified.”
- iii. Paul couldn’t make it any clearer. We are not justified by the works of the law; we are justified by faith in Jesus. In other words, God doesn’t declare us righteous because we have achieved righteousness in our lives, but because we believe in Jesus. In other words, God declares the unrighteous to be righteous if they believe in Jesus.
- iv. This doesn’t seem right. This doesn’t seem like justice. God is just. He is committed to doing what is right all the time. He cannot just overlook our sin; or excuse it; or pretend it didn’t happen. For God to be the perfectly righteous judge of the universe, He has to punish sin. How can God declare the unrighteous to be righteous?

- v. This is where an understanding of the cross comes into play. Why did Jesus die?
- vi. **Galatians 2:21** “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.”
  - 1. Here Paul is talking about the ground, or the basis of our justification, or our being declared righteous. He contrasts two ideas – the law, and Christ’s death. If righteousness, or our justification could be achieved through keeping the law, then Christ didn’t need to die. What is he talking about? When Christ died, He paid the penalty for our sins, so we can be declared not guilty. The whole reason Christ died is that we can’t save ourselves; we deserve to be punished. And that penalty had to be paid. But if we could somehow save ourselves through our own good works, then why did Christ need to die?
- vii. Because Christ paid the just penalty that our sins deserved, God is now able to declare us righteous.
- viii. But to receive this gift, we have to believe. We have to have faith in Jesus Christ.
  - 1. **Jl Packer** calls faith “self-abandoning trust in the person and work of Jesus.”
  - 2. **RC Sproul** calls faith “personal trust that clings to Christ alone for salvation. Saving faith is also a penitent faith that embraces Christ as Savior and Lord.”
- ix. The death of Christ for our sins is the basis of our justification; and faith in Christ is the way to acquire this justification. Its basis is the death of Christ. The means is faith. The ground of justification is the death of Christ; the method of securing it is faith.
- x. Contrast this with the Roman Catholic teaching on justification, which says that to receive initial justification, one must be baptized. And then after your initial justification, you must fulfill the works of the law and achieve perfect righteousness. The protestant doctrine of justification is not through our works of righteousness, but through Christ’s work of on the cross. And it is received not through baptism, but through faith in Christ.
- xi. **Jl Packer**, *Knowing God*, 202 “...justification frees one forever from the need to keep the law, or try to, as the means of earning life...”
- xii. The doctrine of justification by faith alone means that we don’t have to try hard to be as good as possible to get to heaven. We are justified by faith, not works.
- xiii. At the same time, the law is not nullified. We still abide by God’s moral law to please Him out of gratitude.
- xiv. **Martin Luther** “Justification is by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone.”

- xv. Paul goes on to summarize the doctrine of justification by faith in verses 17-20.
- xvi. **Galatians 2:17-18** 17 But if we ourselves are also found to be “sinners” while seeking to be justified by Christ, is Christ then a promoter of sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild those things that I tore down, I show myself to be a lawbreaker.
  - 1. “Is Christ then a promoter of sin?” If we as Jews stop relying on the law for salvation, and actually break the Jewish laws, is Christ a promoter of sin?
  - 2. “Absolutely not!” The true lawbreaker is the one who relies on the law for salvation.
- xvii. **Galatians 2:19** “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live for God.”
  - 1. “Through the law I died to the law.” As a Jew seeking to be justified through law-works, Paul realized that he was unable to keep the law, and therefore he stopped trying to earn justification. He stopped relying on the law.
  - 2. “So that I might live for God.” When you stop relying on the law and start relying upon Christ, you can finally have a right relationship with God. As long as you are trying to earn salvation by your own efforts, you cannot please God. You have to admit that you do not deserve justification, and that you cannot earn it; and that only through Christ’s sacrifice can you be justified.
- xviii. **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
  - 1. “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live.”
    - a. That is, because of Christ’s crucifixion, I the old me that used to try to earn salvation by law-works is dead.
  - 2. “But Christ lives in me.”
    - a. Paul isn’t just affirming that Christ lives in believers, but that it is Christ who saves him, not himself.
  - 3. “The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
    - a. Paul no longer relies on works; now relies on Jesus’ sacrifice for him.

## VI. CONCLUSION

- 1. The greatest leader of the Protestant Reformation was Martin Luther. Luther went to law school, but one day he was caught in a thunderstorm, and when a lightning bolt struck he cried out, “St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk!” So, against his father’s wishes he entered an Augustinian monastery. Luther was terrified of hell.

As a good Catholic, he knew he needed to Christ's sacrifice, but he also knew he needed to earn it through. So he pursued religion with all of his strength. The life of a monk was not easy. It included the renunciation of self-will, a scant diet, rough clothing, prayer vigils in the middle of the night, hard work during the day, mortification of the flesh, a life of poverty, the shame of begging, and prayers seven times a day. The more he fulfilled his duties, the more fearful he became. He practiced prayers in excess of what was required. He often slept without blankets to mortify the flesh. One of the things that Luther most feared was the idea of mortal sins. According to Catholic teaching, justification is not a once-and-for-all declaration. You may be justified one day, but not the next day. There are two kinds of sins – venial sins, or sins that aren't very serious; and mortal sins, serious sins that cause you to lose your justification/salvation. If you die with venial sins on your record, you can still go to heaven, but you first have to purge your soul in purgatory. But if you die with a mortal sin on your record, you will go to hell. That's why the sacrament of penance is so important. To regain your justification after committing a mortal sin, you must undergo penance. This includes confessing your sins to the priest, and then committing acts of penance. Martin Luther was terrified that he would commit a mortal sin, and then die before doing penance, so he would go to confession frequently, and spend hours. One time he confessed for six hours straight. His confessor suggested that he become a professor, and so he was appointed as a philosophy teacher. One day he was studying the Bible when he came across the verse, "The just shall live by faith." Or, the righteous shall live by faith. His eyes were opened and he was saved. Right then and there he understood that justification is not by works, but by faith. We don't go to heaven because we are righteous; we go to heaven because Christ died for our sins. And we receive that gift through faith in Him. After this, Luther went on to lead the Protestant Reformation. Luther's favorite book of the Bible was the book of Galatians. The core tenet of the Reformation was justification by faith alone. Luther called the doctrine of justification by faith alone *articulus stantis vel cadentis ecclesiae*: the article by which the church stands or falls.

2. There are two kinds of people in this world. Those who are trying to earn heaven, and those who realize they can't earn heaven, and instead put their faith in Christ who earned it for them. Those who believe in justification by works, and those who believe in justification by faith alone. Which are you?
3. Justification means that on judgment day God declares you righteous and allows you into heaven. But the gift of justification isn't given to you on judgment day; it is given to you the moment you believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. The moment you believe, God declares you legally righteous in His sight.
4. And it is a onetime act that can never be undone.
  - i. **Jl Packer** "The justifying sentence, once passed, is irrevocable. The wrath of God will not touch the justified. Those accepted now are secure forever."



ii. **Jl Packer**, *Knowing God*, 202, says “justification means pardon of all sin, past, present, and future, and complete acceptance for all eternity...”

5. Have you believed in Jesus?