

WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

**The Gospel According to Galatians
Scripture Text: Galatians Chapter 2
Justification by Faith Alone in Christ Alone**

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HAPPY 489TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE PROTESTANT REFORMATION!

REMEMBER:

“CHRIST WILL DO ALL FOR YOU, OR NOTHING FOR YOU.”

J. GRESHAM MACHEN (GAL. 2:21)

This month is the 489th anniversary of the Reformation of the Sixteenth century. Has the Church today forgotten the truth of justification by faith alone that God in his grace allowed his people to fully recover and boldly preach in the Reformation? Do Christians today even know what the biblical importance of the Reformation was all about? Do Christians today care?

Beating a Doctrine into Our Heads?

In the next two studies, we want to consider the important doctrine of Justification by faith alone. In part one, we will consider Paul's doctrine in the context of Galatians 2, and then we will look at the doctrine from more of a theological point of view derived from Scripture, exegesis, and the Church's historical and faithful reflection on this important doctrine in part two.

**Justification by faith alone in Christ alone is the gospel;
it IS the “good news”!**

Martin Luther wrote this about justification by faith alone in his *Commentary on Galatians*:

[Justification] is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consists. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into our heads continually. (pg. 101, quoted in Stott).

There is no greater truth of Scripture which all people need to understand and know than the Biblical teaching of justification by faith alone. Yet many in today's churches, even in Bible-believing, evangelical churches, have a difficulty defining the gospel, which is the Biblical teaching of justification by faith alone.

For many evangelicals today, the Reformation is "old news" not necessarily "good news"! We live in a time when Bible believing, evangelical churches have all but forgotten their great heritage!

What the Holy Spirit is doing in the present "today" has been unnecessarily and disrespectfully placed in a tension with what the Holy Spirit has been doing in building up and teaching the Church in the past! You may ask:

Why are many evangelicals today simply not interested in the work of God's Spirit in the Reformation where the doctrine of justification by faith alone was recovered by God's grace?

Professor Gary Johnson writes and tries to answer this question:

The Protestant Reformation was...first and foremost, a theological revolution. The present-day evangelical attitude toward the place and importance of theology in the life of the church is a major reason why the Reformation has been eclipsed in the evangelical church. Theology is either considered a necessary evil or something that is, practically speaking, irrelevant to the concerns of ministry and church growth. (*Whatever Happened to the Reformation?*, edited by Johnson and White).

Dr. Michael Horton comments on this eclipse of the Reformation and its teachings in evangelicalism by pointing out that in many ways evangelicals are more influenced by the 'spirit of the age' rather than by the Spirit of God:

This eclipse [of the teaching of the Reformation, particularly justification by faith alone in Christ alone] is tragic not because it represents a break with a 'golden age' that we recall with sentimental nostalgia. Rather, it concerns us because it indicates a break with the authority, sufficiency, and in many respects even the content of Scripture – gains that were made by the Reformation at enormous cost. Like the prodigal son, the evangelical movement has preferred the excitement of the culture to the privileged life of an heir in the Father's house. It is not difficult to discern that our churches by and large are increasingly less shaped by Scripture than by the managerial, pragmatic, marketing, entertainment, therapeutic, and technological values of our day." (*Whatever Happened to the Reformation?*, edited by Johnson and White).

We truly need to heed Martin Luther's words and to beat this important doctrine into our heads continually!

The doctrine of *Justification by Faith Alone* was called the hinge on which true religion turns. The doctrine of justification by faith alone is the door that opens up (or closes!) for us a right standing before God. Calvin wrote:

[Justification by faith alone] is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater and attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation, nor one on which to grow in grace and piety toward God. (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 3.11.1).

For Martin Luther the doctrine of justification was literally and seriously the foundational doctrine upon which the Church stands or falls!

Justification by faith alone is the true gospel of the Christian faith that the Apostle Paul explains clearly in Galatians 3 and Romans 4, and we need to make sure that we fully understand it.

It is upon this teaching of justification by faith alone, that the whole Christian life is built!

Test yourself! What is the meaning of justification by faith alone? (Take a moment to answer this for yourself before continuing to read). Do you know how to answer this question? Asking this question is as important as asking 'How can a person be right with God?' In fact, the answer to the first question is the true answer to the second question.

Justification by faith alone does NOT mean "to justify one's sins before God" – whatever that means! It does NOT mean "clean oneself up and work hard to do well by going to church and being nice to people and God will reward you by justifying you!" To be justified does not mean to cooperate by faith with God, by attempting to do works of the law.

What justification by faith means is that when we believe upon Jesus Christ by faith alone, his perfect merits and works that he earned by loving God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength, are given to us!

God declares sinners righteous based on Christ's works alone!

Salvation is by works – but not the works of sinful man
(John 3:11-13; Rom. 3:23; 6:23)

...Salvation is by the works of Christ alone!

I realize that justification can be a difficult teaching of the Bible to understand. Some think if Paul pushes grace alone apart from any works, it might produce people who trust in heaven, but live like hell. To many, justification by faith alone sounds like "Let us keep on sinning so that grace may increase." But this is an incorrect understanding of Paul's gospel, and we must do what we can to understand it to the best of our ability because it is the gospel. W. Robert Godfrey has written on how the doctrine can be difficult and misunderstood by some when justification by faith alone is preached:

If Paul in his own day was not always understood by his own churches on the doctrine of justification, we should perhaps not be surprised that the churches since that time have so often failed to get it. The true doctrine of justification always strikes some as antinomian, even though it is not. Paul must often have faced the question:

'Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?' (Rom. 6:1). A doctrine of justification that does not from time to time evoke that question is not the biblical doctrine of justification.
(*The Pattern of Sound Doctrine*, edited by VanDrunen, pg. 129).

Although it can be somewhat misunderstood, it is imperative for Christians that we understand this teaching because this *is the gospel!* The good news (and what makes the news really good!) is that in the Person and Work of Jesus Christ in his perfect life, substitutionary death, resurrection, and ascension, we are justified, or declared righteous before God based on what Christ has done **for us!**

Salvation is not, and never has been by the works of man! Even our best works are unacceptable before a Holy God. Jesus Christ's works for us in his life, death, resurrection and ascension become our perfect works before God in our justification.

We are justified before God, or declared righteous, because in Jesus' resurrection from the dead, he was justified, or vindicated as righteous before the whole world, so that all those who believe in him would be vindicated or justified before God!

The Apostle Paul writes in Romans 4,

Romans 4:23-25 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,²⁵

who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Faith was “counted” or reckoned to Abraham for believing God. Abraham was declared righteous by God, and we are declared righteous by God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

**“CHRIST WILL DO ALL FOR YOU, OR NOTHING FOR YOU.”
J. GRESHAM MACHEN**

Justification by Faith Alone “in Context”: Galatians 2

What was the context in Galatians 2 where the Apostle Paul first teaches this important doctrine in the Epistle to the Galatians?

Let us read Galatians 2 for the context,

Galatians 2:1-14 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³ **But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.** ⁴ **Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in- who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery-** ⁵ **to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.** ⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)- those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. ¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray

by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ **But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"**

Judaizers and Circumcision

The Judaizers were teaching the Churches of Galatian that all Greeks ought to be circumcised according to Law 'and' believe in Jesus in order to be "fully" Christian (an early proto-"full gospel movement"!). Paul calls the Judaizers "false brothers" who slipped in to spy out the freedom the churches had in Jesus Christ, with the purpose of bringing them back into slavery.

Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in- who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery- ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you (Galatians 2:4-5).

Paul was bold in the face of this opposition and possible persecution, and Titus stood bravely with him by not being circumcised "though he was a Greek".

Paul wrote,

Galatians 2:3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

So Paul was being brave, courageous, and understanding what he would later tell Timothy, "God has not given you the spirit of fear, but of love, power and a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:7).

Augustine wrote concerning Titus,

It was because of the intrigues of false brethren that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. It was not possible to require circumcision of him. Those who had crept in to spy on their liberty had a vehement expectation and desire for the circumcision of Titus. They wanted, with Paul's testimony and consent, to preach circumcision as necessary to salvation." (Augustine, *Epistle to the Galatians II*, IB.2.3-5).

Now, the reason Paul opposed Peter publicly here in this passage is because although he knew Peter affirmed that the Gentiles should not be circumcised, Peter was afraid or fearful of speaking up (according to Paul's earlier meetings with Peter, and perhaps to the Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15).

Peter had received the same gospel as Paul from the Lord Jesus (cf. Gal. 2:16: “We know...”), but he was not walking in the truth of this gospel; he was “play-acting” or being the hypocrite.

Paul had apparently previously spoken to Peter about his hypocrisy or fear prior to this event because he would have taken seriously the teaching of Jesus on how to approach, rebuke, and/or correct a brother and elder who is in sin (cf. Matthew 18). The public sin of Peter could have also been a reason to publicly rebuke him.

We must understand that Peter was not adding something to the gospel, or approving of what the Judaizers were teaching the Galatian churches, **but neither was he polemically and vigorously opposing them! Why? Because apparently he was scared that his reputation might be tarnished like the Apostle Paul’s among the Jews or the circumcision party.**

This was NOT Peter’s teaching or doctrine, but he was fearful of standing up to those who were part of the “circumcision party”.

Paul was brave, and Peter was cowardly (again!?).

Galatians 2:12-13 For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; **but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.**¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their **hypocrisy.**

“The circumcision” would normally refer to the Jews (see Romans 2), but more specifically here “the circumcision party” within the churches at Galatia (and Antioch), would refer **to those Judaizers who had infiltrated the congregations teaching a “full gospel” that a person was saved by Jesus plus circumcision or law.**

The Judaizers were a forceful party and as Galatians 2:12 says, Peter was scared of them. We do not know why he feared. Perhaps he was frightened of losing his reputation with some of his kin folk, or losing honor in the Jewish eyes, or perhaps some were friendships he wanted to keep, or maybe he thought Paul had taken his theology a bit too far? Whatever it was, we are only told that he feared them (Unfortunately, this sounds a lot like some ministers of the gospel today!)

Peter was the “Apostle to the Circumcision” as Paul was the “Apostle to the Uncircumcised” and this position was important to set the right example to the people of God, particularly the babes in Christ, the new believers at these churches. It seems that Peter eventually learned this truth by God’s grace, because he writes to other elders later in his life,

1 Peter 5:1-6 So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: ² **shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly;** ³ **not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.** ⁴ And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory. ⁵ Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for **"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."** ⁶ **Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you...**

Peter's position as "Apostle to the Circumcision" placed him in a position of influence, and we see that Barnabas who helped Paul establish the churches had begun to "play act" or to be a hypocrite also by not eating with the Gentiles, and withdrawing because of fear of the Judaizers.

Paul is "consistent" with his attitude toward the Judaizers in response to this hypocrisy, rebukes Peter to his face and splashes the scalding water of the law in Peter's face in order to shake him from his hypocritical slumbers. Paul then masterfully declares the good news of the gospel to Peter!

Galatians 2:14-19 is a fascinating Pauline passage for its balance of law and gospel: the law threatens and condemns, and the good news of the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ holds out hope!

Galatians 2:14-19 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, **"If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"**

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ **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.** ¹⁷ 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! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

Paul rebukes and reminds Peter that he lives in all the freedom of a Gentile (not under Mosaic Law) now that he is a Christian (Peter understands theoretically that there is “neither Jew nor Gentile, but all are one in Jesus” because he was taught this by the Lord himself).

Yet because of fear, he sees the powerful party of the circumcision, and realizes that they not only require for Gentiles to undergo circumcision, but that they also have Mosaic dietary laws they must following (read: kosher) in order to partake in a meal.

Peter goes through the cafeteria line, comes out into the dining hall at Antioch and sees the stern looks of the Judaizers to the left of the kitchen enjoying their Mosaic dietary requirements, not “saving places” for any Gentiles unless they will eat the Old Covenant way (and of course, if you sit at their table, you better be circumcised!).

Peter decides that he will eat with them because he fears the persecution of the Judaizers if he sits to the right with the Gentiles at their table (OK, ‘one in Christ **sometimes!**’).

Peter thinks, “Well, I’m not endorsing what the Judaizers believe; I just want peace, and not doctrinal conflict.” And then others follow him in his bad example (including the leaders and church planters of these congregations!!), and this implicitly undermines the Apostle Paul’s authority because he is taking a stand against this false teaching and calling it “another gospel”, and so he rebukes or ‘opposes’ Peter publicly for this – just because the gospel “IS” at stake (*anthistemi*, Gk.- oppose, withstand forcefully; cf. 2 Tim. 3:8; 4:15).

Paul says in essence to Peter, “Peter, you’re born and bred a Jew, not a “Gentile sinner,” and you have found freedom in Christ not under law, so why are you suggesting the Gentiles become Jews under Law when you yourself fully know and understand the bondage that we were under? Although the Law is good, holy, and righteous, it was powerless to change sinners, because it was weakened by the flesh! (Note: “Gentile sinner” was a term used for non-Jews who did not have God’s Law to teach them, as in the Gospels where “tax collectors and sinners” are designated as a specific group not under the Mosaic Law as a tutor)...”

Paul goes on to say to Peter, “Even though you know that all people are declared righteous before God based on grace and nothing else, whether they are Jew or Gentile sinner (whether they are born under the revelation of Mosaic Law, or whether they are born “strangers to the covenant”, outside the revelation of Mosaic Law, cf. Eph. 2:11ff). Peter, you know the Law condemns all, and so the only hope of any person, whether Jew or Gentile, is found in the gospel- -not the Law.” As Paul writes in more detail in Romans 2-3,

Romans 2:25-29 For circumcision indeed is of value if you obey the law, but if you break the law, your circumcision becomes uncircumcision. ²⁶ So, if a man who is uncircumcised keeps the precepts of the law, will not his uncircumcision be regarded as circumcision? ²⁷ Then he who is physically uncircumcised but keeps the law will condemn you who have the written code and circumcision but break the law. ²⁸ For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. ²⁹ **But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter. His praise is not from man but from God.....**

Romans 3:9-10, 19-24 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. **For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin,** ¹⁰ **as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;** ¹¹ no one understands; no one seeks for God....

...Now we know that whatever the law says it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped, and **the whole world may be held accountable to God.** ²⁰ **For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.** ²¹ But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the Law and the Prophets bear witness to it- ²² the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus...

The good news of the gospel is,

Romans 8:3-4 For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

We are justified, or declared righteous based on Christ and his righteousness alone- -plus nothing, so let us all partake and eat together as Jews and Gentiles, united to Jesus Christ by faith as children of the living God, heirs of the inheritance to Father Abraham, and the True Israel of God (Gal.. 3:26-:4:7; 6:16).

As Paul writes in Ephesians 2, the dividing wall or partition of hostility between Jew and Gentile had been broken down by faith in Christ alone; he was not going to rebuild that “Law wall” (cf. Galatians 2:17-19).

Ephesians 2:11-16 Therefore remember that at one time you Gentiles in the flesh, called "the uncircumcision" by what is called the circumcision, which is made in the flesh by hands- ¹² remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. ¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. ¹⁴ **For he himself is our peace, who has made us both one and has broken down in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility ¹⁵ by abolishing the law of commandments and ordinances, that he might create in himself one new man in place of the two, so making peace, ¹⁶ and might reconcile us both to God in one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility.**

Summary of Peter's predicament and Paul's passionate response,

- 1) Peter was fearful of standing up for the gospel (“peace over doctrinal conflict”).
- 2) Peter's hypocrisy was influencing other brothers (because of his great prominence and importance), including Barnabas.
- 3) Paul rebukes Peter because the gospel *is Justification by Christ alone!*

Perhaps you can ask yourself: “How far are you willing to go to defend, believe, **and live** the gospel against threats, persecution, loss of reputation, or your very life?” There is a time to speak for the truth of the gospel. There is a time when silence is a sin because we are NOT speaking the truth in love when we hear the gospel taught improperly.

Paul is rebuking Peter severely for acting like he believes in the gospel of Christ plus nothing, and acting a different way in the face of persecution, slander, or tough times! Both Jews and Gentiles are one in Christ Jesus, and both are saved by faith alone in Christ alone!

A Brief Note on the New Perspective on Paul (NPP)

It is important to note against the teaching today on the New Perspective on Paul that the issue in Galatians 2 is an ecclesiastical situation, but it is foundationally a soteriological problem. The NPP teaches concerning this passage that the issue is unity in Jesus Christ for Jews and Gentiles, and so their main emphasis is on this passage as an ecclesiastical-ecclesiological issue.

It is true that part of the passage does indeed address the ecclesiastical-ecclesiological importance of Jews and Gentiles being one in Jesus Christ. But the soteriological issue at stake, namely justification by faith alone is the foundation of this passage, and thus the basis for any unity in Jesus Christ. Contrary to what the NPP thinks about the Reformation getting Paul wrong, we can be absolutely confident that the Reformers did indeed get Paul “right” (not “Wright” as in N. T.).

The context of Galatians 2:11-21 teaches us that there should be an ecclesiastical-ecclesiological unity between all Jews and Gentiles “in Christ,” but the point of the passage is that justification is by faith alone in Christ alone, and the foundational issue is one of soteriology.

We should not think we must eclipse justification by faith alone (the soteriological issue) by the importance of the unity of Jews and Gentiles in Jesus Christ (the ecclesiastical-ecclesiological issue). The latter is grounded in the former. You cannot have ecclesiastical-ecclesiological unity in anything other than the gospel of Jesus Christ and his righteousness alone!

Note: For more reading on this, I highly recommend Dr. Guy Prentiss Waters’ book *Justification and the New Perspective on Paul: A Review and Response*, especially chapter eight!

Titus and Timothy: “For the Gospel’s Sake!”

There is one important note that we need to understand, so as to appreciate Paul’s wisdom with regard to Titus and Timothy, and not think that Paul was somehow inconsistent because he did not circumcise Titus (Gal. 2:3), but did circumcise Timothy (Acts 16). Paul did indeed have Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3 (whose mother was Jewish, so he was half-Jewish).

Acts 16:1-3 Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.² He was well spoken of by the brothers at Lystra and Iconium.³ Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.

Unlike the Judaizer situation in the Province of Galatia, Timothy’s circumcision was not done as a way of salvation, or to add to what Christ had already done (this was the case with Titus and thus the reason why he was not circumcised). Timothy’s circumcision was primarily as a means of commending a half-Jew to his Jewish hearers for the sake of the gospel and being received (not to teach or to suggest to them that Gentiles must do this and become Jewish first).

Paul circumcised Timothy for more of a cultural reason in order to proclaim the gospel (that required nothing added to it, but the Jewish people who had not heard the gospel still lived, moved and had their being in an Old Covenant context or milieu).

Paul here was not being inconsistent because it was not considered a way to be righteous before God, but to enter into the Old Covenant milieu of the Jews through the preaching of God's grace by a half-Jew. Paul insists in Galatians 5-6 that circumcision or uncircumcision counts for anything with regards to salvation, so we know clearly where Paul stood on this matter!

Let me put it this way for contrast. The situation at Galatia and Antioch was that the Judaizers said that the Gentiles and those who came from the heathen world must enter into the Old Covenant ritual, Mosaic world of the Jew FIRST in order to be saved. They had to become part of the Old Covenant to receive the good news of the New Covenant if you will (and the Judaizers had not noticed that there was a radical redemptive-historical shift with the coming of Jesus in the fullness of the times, (Gal. 4:4).

In contrast to this situation in Galatia, Paul in Acts 16 is taking a half-Jew into the culture-world-milieu of the Old Covenant Jews. He desires a half-Jew named Timothy to be received not as an example of how Gentiles "get saved" but wants to ensure that the gospel is made known to them.

By circumcising Timothy, Paul was accommodating to the redemptive-historical milieu in which these people lived in order for them to know a radical shift had indeed occurred with the coming of Christ and circumcision was just merely a sign that pointed to a greater reality in the gospel and the coming of Christ- -the very circumcision of Christ- - made without hands, on the cross.

Colossians 2:11-16 In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

GALATIANS 2:14-16: JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

So what is the gospel that Paul reminds Peter and the others at Galatia of? How can a person be made righteous before God if it is futile to depend upon works of the Law? Paul reminds him of the good news of justification! Notice how Paul writes “we know” the truth of this gospel in verse 16 proving that both had believed the same gospel from Christ!

¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ 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.

In our passage in Galatians 1:16, Paul uses the verb *dikaioo* (Gk.) “justified” in the passive, third person singular verb form. Pastor John Stott in his *Commentary on Galatians* writes about the word “justified,” saying,

In these verses an important word occurs for the first time in Galatians. It is central to the message of the Epistle, central to the gospel preached by Paul, and indeed central to Christianity itself. **Nobody has understood Christianity who does not understand this word (emphasis mine, pg. 58).**

In an effort to better understand this word, let us look at the word in verb and noun form.

Verb: “To Justify” (v. 16, 3x). The verb *dikaoo*, or “to justify” means to be considered, declared, or reckoned as righteous (cf. Romans 4).

The passive verb form of “justified” is also used by Luke in Acts 13:38-39 in a summary of the gospel found in Christ alone apart from the Mosaic Law, and later in Paul’s letter to the Galatians in 3:11,

Acts 13:38 Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed (“Justified”) from everything ³⁹ **from which you could not be freed (“Justified”) by the law of Moses** (I am not sure why the ESV translators translated the passive “justified” to “freed” but the word “freed” here in the ESV is “justified” in the Greek). The ASV translates the word more accurately:

(ASV) Acts 13:39 ...and by him every one that believeth is justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

Galatians 3:11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

In all of the passages above, justified is in the passive. Lutheran scholar and theologian R.C.H. Lenski in his superb commentary on Galatians wrote,

The passive *dikaioutai* (passive form of *dikaioo*) has God as the agent. The verb, the noun, and the adjective are always forensic; so are the opposites; so are the synonyms, in Hebrew, in Greek, in the Old Testament, in the Apocrypha, in the New Testament. The sense is, "to *declare* righteous" and never, "to *make* righteous.

Lenski continues,

This is the sense in even secular statements. Always a judge is involved who pronounces a verdict. When the judge is God, the verdict establishes a relation to God and to his judgment, to his...norm of right...the passive is to be understood... 'to be pronounced righteous,' and is never converted into the middle 'to become righteous.' (Lenski, Galatians, pg. 105 (more on the forensic aspect below in our study).

Noun: "Justification" (v. 21) Righteousness from God given by faith in Christ (cf. Romans 1:16-17), and thus a righteous person. This is a right standing before God based and being justified.

To be justified before God is to be counted, declared, or reckoned as really and truly righteous, because a righteousness from God has been received by faith alone in Christ alone!

In the gospel, a righteousness of God is revealed in Christ alone. We receive his righteousness as our own, and we stand declared, reckoned, or counted as righteous before God! This is justification by faith alone in Christ alone!

For Paul, justification by faith alone IS the good news- -it is the gospel! Paul calls Justification by faith alone "the Truth of the Gospel" (vv. 5, 14- Justification by Faith alone in Christ alone)

Galatians 2:5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, **so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.**

Galatians 2:14 But when I saw that their conduct was **not in step with the truth of the gospel**, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

In order to better understand justification, or the truth of the gospel, or the good news as truly good news, we must first understand what the Apostle means by the works of the Law. For the Apostle Paul, salvation is by works – but only by the works of Christ's alone. For only Christ has performed the works of the Law perfectly, which is what God requires.

For the Apostle Paul in Galatians 2:14-16 (and particularly in Romans 4), justification by works of the law and justification by faith alone are mutually exclusive categories, two ways to God, one wide that leads to destruction, and one narrow that leads to life and few find it!

In the Reformation and today, the reason why the word "alone" tied to faith, as in "faith alone" is so important is because Paul had been under a system of faith plus works of the Law, and had miserably failed time and again (Phil. 3:3-14).

Paul knew that our only hope was in Christ's perfect law keeping for us, and this righteousness that he earned was to be received by faith alone.

The Apostle Paul and "works of the Law" (mutually exclusive categories)

Remember from our previous studies that Judaism of Paul's day was not full blown "Pelagianism", but rather 'Semi-Pelagianism" (see last study).

Judaizers were teaching Semi-Pelagian cooperating with God's grace by doing "works of the Law." "Works of the law" in Paul do not refer simply to Pelagianism or striving to work one's way into heaven apart from God's grace in the covenant (notice how he calls 'Gentile sinners' because they were outside the covenant and outside the teaching and preaching of the law- -which was a gracious situation, or a situation of grace sometimes called "covenantal nomism"). This was not full blown Pelagian-Legalism, but cooperation with grace in the covenant to produce "works of the law."

"Works of the Law" are the attempted obedience to the Law with hopes that one will be justified ("the Law" refers to the Mosaic teaching in all its totality). The "works of the law" as a way of justification for the Apostle Paul could be summarized in this way (this would describe Paul's former life in Judaism, the

religion of his fathers (cf. Galatians 1:13-15), that he now considered “rubbish” (Phil. 3:4-8):

- 1) Keep the Ten Commandments by loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength in word, thought and deed.
- 2) Obey the ceremonial aspects of the law such as certain dietary laws and circumcision.
- 3) Do all these things, cooperating with God’s grace, and you will hopefully be justified or pronounced “not guilty” by the “works of the law”.

The problem with this way of justification is that the Law damns and condemns sinners (whether Jew or Gentile). Whether we have the Law or we do not have the law, we are condemned if we do not keep God’s holy and perfect law- -perfectly! The Law was to be a tutor to lead us to Christ (Gal. 3:19ff).

It is important to take note of Paul’s doctrine of faith plus “works of the law” (cooperation with God) versus faith alone in Christ alone in Romans and Galatians:

Romans 3:20 For **by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight**, since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

Romans 4:4 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ **And to the one who does not work but trusts him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...**

Romans 9:30-33 What shall we say, then? That Gentiles who did not pursue righteousness have attained it, that is, a righteousness that is by faith; ³¹ but that Israel who pursued a law that would lead to righteousness did not succeed in reaching that law. ³² Why? **Because they did not pursue it by faith, but as if it were based on works. They have stumbled over the stumbling stone,** ³³ as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame."

Romans 10:1-3 Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. ² I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. ³ **For, being ignorant of the righteousness that comes from God, and**

seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.

Romans 11:5-6 So too at the present time there is a remnant, chosen by grace. ⁶ **But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.**

Galatians 2:16 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.**

Galatians 3:2 Let me ask you only this: **Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?**

Galatians 3:5 Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so **by works of the law, or by hearing with faith-**

Galatians 3:10 **For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse**; for it is written, "Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them."

J. Gresham Machen wrote wisely and poignantly on Galatians 2:16, pointing out that our faith is not a work, but a gift of God, an instrument whereby we receive the righteousness of God in Christ (cf. Eph. 2:4-9),

A man is not justified by the works of the law except through faith in Christ Jesus", and that would mean that if a man has faith in Jesus to help the works of the law out, he can be justified by the works of the law after all; it would mean that, while a man is not justified by works alone, he is justified by works and faith taken together. Thus faith would become merely the means by which a man's works become effective for salvation. (Galatians, pg. 147).

Paul is clear about justification by works of the law and justification by faith in Christ alone as being mutually exclusive in both Romans and Galatians, and he summarizes this in Galatians 2:16-21!

- 1) A person is NOT justified by works of the law...
- 2) ...But "through faith" or "by faith" in Jesus (the "alone" added here because it is not "faith plus works of the Law" but faith in Christ alone)....\
- 3) ...NOT by works of the Law

You are either saved by faith plus something you add, or you are saved by faith alone, knowing that nothing you add would be acceptable to a holy God, and that you would nullify or make void the cross of Christ if you tried to add anything to what Christ has already done for you (cf. Gal. 2:19-21)!

...Faith in Christ Jesus is the opposite of all works of law; they exclude each other: to be justified 'as the result of faith' = to be justified *NOT* 'as a result of works of the law.' *The two will not mingle. He who would put one foot on faith and the other on such works plunges into the gulf. Make Christ the bridge, all save the last inch, use works of law for that, and the bridge crashes the moment you step on it. (Lenski, pg. 107).*

"CHRIST WILL DO ALL FOR YOU, OR NOTHING FOR YOU."

—J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Theologian Louis Berkhof defines justification carefully and helpfully saying "Justification is a judicial act of God, in which He declares, on the basis of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that all the claims of the law are satisfied with respect to the sinner" (L. Berkhof, *Systematic Theology*, p. 513).

What the Apostle Paul and theologian L. Berkhof are teaching is that our being declared, reckoned, or considered righteous before God based on faith alone in Christ alone is that God sees us as if we have never sinned and that we are as perfect as his beloved Son. It also means that God sees us as if we have perfectly kept the law because Jesus has done this for us on our behalf!

Paul writes that Jesus became sin for us (cursed for our failure to perfectly to works of the law) so that we might be the righteousness of God in him (blessed in Christ because his righteousness is our righteousness!):

2 Corinthians 5:21 For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

1 Corinthians 1:30 He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom and our righteousness and sanctification and redemption. ³¹ Therefore, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

John Calvin defined justification by faith alone in his 'Institutes' (1509-64),

To be justified in the sight of God, to be Justified by faith or by works. A man is said to be justified in the sight of God when in the judgment of God he is deemed righteous, and is accepted on account of his righteousness... Thus we simply interpret

justification, as the acceptance with which God receives us into his favor as if we were righteous; and we say that this justification consists in the forgiveness of sins and the imputation of the righteousness of Christ (*Institutes*, 3.11.2).

The Westminster Larger Catechism teaches us that justification is an act of God's free grace...

WLC 70 What is justification?

Justification is an act of God's free grace unto sinners,(1) in which he pardoneth all their sins, accepteth and accounteth their persons righteous in his sight;(2) not for any thing wrought in them, or done by them,(3) but only for the perfect obedience and full satisfaction of Christ, by God imputed to them,(4) and received by faith alone. (5) (1)Rom. 3:22,24,25; Rom. 4:5 (2)2 Cor. 5:19,21; Rom. 3:22, 24, 25, 27, 28 (3) Tit. 3:5,7; Eph. 1:7 (4) Rom. 5:17-19; Rom. 4:6-8 (5) Acts 10:43; Gal. 2:16; Phil. 3:9

Legal Declaration: Justification is Forensic

We have learned from our study that “justify” means to “declare righteous,” or “pronounce righteous,” and not to “make righteous.” It is expedient that we understand justification as forensic or legal. J. Gresham Machen wrote,

God's act in “justifying the sinner” is – if we may use a theological term – a “forensic” act. That is, it is an act that is analogous to the act of a judge in pronouncing a sentence of acquittal upon a prisoner at the bar. (*Galatians*, pg. 146).

Justification is the opposite of condemnation (cf. Romans 8:31-34). Those who are justified are not condemned. “There is no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus” (Romans 8:1) could be said oppositely: “There is justification for those in Christ” which is why it is important to understand justification as being legally declared by God the Judge as righteous in his sight. Paul writes later in Romans 8:

Romans 8:31-34: What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? ³³ ***Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies.*** ³⁴ ***Who is to condemn?*** Christ Jesus is the one who died- more than that, who was raised- who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us.

Notice Paul's contrast between condemnation and justification. God justifies (or pronounces "not guilty" in Christ- v. 33), so who can bring a charge against God's elect? God condemns (or pronounces "guilty" for not believing in Christ but trusting in one's own righteousness).

Do you find justification before God in Christ alone? Or are you condemned before God's judgment throne because you have not believed in the only Name given whereby a person can be saved?

Condemnation: Pronounced "Guilty" and "Unrighteous"

Justification: Pronounced "Not Guilty" and "Righteous"

"How then can man be righteous before God?" –Job 25:4

Heidelberg Catechism, Q: 60. How are you righteous before God?

Only by true faith in Jesus Christ; that is, although my conscience accuse me, that I have grievously sinned against all the commandments of God, and have never kept any of them, and am still prone always to all evil; yet God without any merit of mine, of mere grace, grants and imputes to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never committed nor had any sin, and had myself accomplished all the obedience which Christ has fulfilled for me; if only I accept such benefit with a believing heart (*Heidelberg Catechism*).

John Calvin stated,

To justify therefore, is nothing else than to acquit from the charge of guilt, as if innocence were proved. Hence, when God justifies us through the intercession of Christ, he does not acquit us on a proof of our own innocence, but by an imputation of righteousness, so that though not righteous in ourselves, we are deemed righteous in Christ (*Institutes*, 3.11.3).

Justification as a forensic or legal category is rejected by the mind of modern man and even many evangelicals.

Why? Because God is often thought of as a loving Father **before He is considered our judge before the Law**. God as Father rather than first God as Judge is given the priority.

What happens perhaps unintentionally for some is that not only is justification and sanctification confused in today's teaching and preaching (Roman

Catholicism and Evangelicalism more on this in our next study, DV), but our adoption is focused upon before our justification.

Professor J. Gresham Machen states this eloquently in the 1930s,

The reason why the forensic aspect of salvation is so distasteful to the 'modern mind' is perfectly plain. It is distasteful because it involves a profound view of sin as transgression of the law of God. Men no longer believe today in a law of God; the only law that they will recognize is a law that a man imposes on himself.

Sin they regard—if they are willing to use at all the antiquated word—as merely imperfection. They will have nothing to do with the idea of guilt. It is no wonder that they will not think of God as Judge. (pg. 146).

But understanding the biblical view of law as the means through which we are to realize we are sinners, condemned before God's throne (Rom. 3:20ff; Gal. 3:19ff), is how we come to look somewhere else—rather, to SOMEONE ELSE for our righteousness and salvation.

In fact, it was Martin Luther's high regard for God's holiness and the great and impossible demands of God's Law for sinners to achieve, that kept Luther tossing in his bed at night, frightened by the reality that his sins would damn him! It was Martin Luther's revelation from Scripture that even our best works are tainted by sin and therefore cannot be meritorious before God's Holy Tribunal! But then by God's grace, Luther realized that Christ the Judge was also Christ the Savior!

As a Roman Catholic priest, Luther knew that all the cooperation with God that he could muster would only end up damning him! Luther studied the Book of Romans and realized that a righteousness **apart from him, found in Christ alone**, received by faith alone, was his only hope to be saved and declared righteous!

In the Reformation of the 16th century, Roman Catholic theology was essentially the same way of salvation as the first century Israelite. Martin Luther was taught by the Roman Catholic Church that men were saved "by grace", but this "grace" was understood as man's cooperation with God in order to achieve salvation ("synergism") – it was not grace received by faith alone in what God has done fully in Christ. Martin Luther's struggle to find God's grace and to have his wrath appeased in the Person of Christ, led to a reformation of the Church and rediscovery of the gospel!

Luther wrote,

Night and day I pondered until I saw the connection between the justice of God and the statement that ‘the just shall live by faith.’ Then I grasped that the justice of God is that righteousness by which through grace and sheer mercy God justifies us **through faith**.

Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise. The whole of Scripture took on new meaning, and whereas the ‘justice of God’ had filled me with hate, now it became to me inexpressibly sweet in great love. This passage became to me the gate of heaven. (*Here I Stand*, Roland Bainton).

For Luther, God had declared him righteous (extrinsically, or outside of himself) rather than what he had been taught in Medieval Roman Catholicism that a person was made “just” or “righteous” (intrinsically), then justified by God.

It is important to consider that Roman Catholics (during the Reformation and today!) would have disagreed that salvation-justification was by grace alone, received by faith alone! (This is still the great problem today and why Evangelicals and Catholics need to be truly honest with one another rather than merely uniting without any consideration of this important doctrine!).

Calvin stated,

Man is not made righteous in justification, but is accepted as righteous, not on account of his own righteousness, but on account of the righteousness of Christ located outside of man. (McGrath’s *Iustitia Dei*, 2:36).

David says in Psalm 32:1-2- “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.

Justification is NOT transformative, or *being made righteous*.

Justification is a legal declaration of *righteousness received by faith*.

“CHRIST WILL DO ALL FOR YOU, OR NOTHING FOR YOU.”

J. GRESHAM MACHEN

Justification by Faith Alone in Christ Alone to be continued next week in Part Two (Deo volente)!

[Imputation, Faith, Justification and Sanctification, and Paul and James will be considered].

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