

MBC – 5/22/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Justified by Faith, Crucified with Christ”
 Galatians 2:15-21

Intro – Is there any hope for maggots and worms?

This morning we are returning to our study in Galatians. But first turn with me to Job 25, where Bildad asks this rhetorical question in light of the holiness and majesty of God—

- Job 25:4–6 ⁴How then can man be in the right before God? How can he who is born of woman be pure? ⁵Behold, even the moon is not bright, and the stars are not pure in His eyes; ⁶how much less man, who is a maggot, and the son of man, who is a worm!”

How can a sinful person ever be accepted by a holy God, who by His nature, demands perfect holiness? This is the mother of all questions! Is there a way to be right with God? There are really only two ways to answer to this question—

- All religion operates on the principle: “I obey – therefore I am accepted by God.”
- The Gospel operates on the principle: “I am accepted by God through Christ – therefore I obey.
- Every other religion says that God measures righteousness by you.
- The Gospel says that God measures righteousness by Christ. And God accepts you when you trust in Christ, and His righteousness.

It’s that simple. Every one of us here this morning, and those listening are either trusting in our righteousness, or we are trusting in Christ’s righteousness. One or the other, with no middle-ground.

- So last Sunday we looked at the possibility of people being saved in the last moments of their lives – people who were godless and unbelieving for their entire lives. You understand that religion would say, “That’s impossible. God only accepts us if we have done enough good in our lifetimes – and that irreligious dying person is done with doing. So no hope”

But the Gospel offers hope because salvation is not about our doing, but about what Christ has done. So up until the 59th minute of the 11th hour of his or her life – a person who trusts in *Jesus* – is accepted by God.

- Religion says, “That’s not fair!” And the Gospel says, “It’s not fair, it’s *grace*.”

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And this is the theme of Paul’s letter to the Galatians: The Gospel proclaims that you are saved by the grace of God alone – not by any of your own deeds – through faith in Christ alone – plus nothing. False teachers had crept into the Galatian churches saying that Paul’s message was incomplete: “Yes, you must trust in Jesus, and also, you must keep the Law of Moses! Faith + works = salvation.”

Paul *condemns* this false Gospel and any who preach it. If you add anything to faith in Christ, you forfeit grace, and you forfeit salvation. In chapter two he gives two real-life situations where this issue came to a head—

1.) When these false teachers demanded that Gentile convert Titus be circumcised (to be saved!), Paul said, “Over my dead body”—

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

Circumcision wasn't wrong – that wasn't the issue – it was the implication that it is necessary for salvation that was the issue—

- Galatians 5:2–4 ²Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. ³I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision (trusts in his circumcision) that he is obligated to keep the whole law. ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (You can't trust in your own works and trust in Christ alone!

2.) The second situation is what we are going to talk about this morning. It had to do with Peter, and it was more subtle, let's look at it again (turn there)—

I. Paul continues his conversation with Peter.

- Galatians 2:11–14 ¹¹But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹²For before certain men came from James (Judaizers = they professed to be Christians, but they were not. They were the legalists who insisted that Gentiles – like Titus – must be circumcised to be saved. Before these intimidating legalists came) Peter was eating with the Gentiles (he was eating non-kosher food and having Christian fellowship with his Gentile brothers and sisters – he knew that he had the freedom in Christ to do so); but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴But 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?”

So Paul says, “Peter, you are a Christian now! You know good and well that Jewish dietary laws are not binding anymore – remember that sheet coming down from the sky with the unclean creatures – 3X? But when you caved to the legalists, your actions implied to our Gentile brothers and sisters that Christians are still under the Law – (now listen) *that we are acceptable to God because of what we do instead of what Christ has done*. Peter, by your actions, you told a lie about the Gospel!”

And that's serious, isn't it? Now, when we pick it up in v.15, Paul is still talking to Peter—

- ¹⁵We ourselves (you and I, Peter) are Jews by birth and not Gentile “sinners;”

Paul isn't being arrogant here, he is being ironic! “Peter, you and I were brought up as Law-keeping-Jews, not ‘Law-neglecting Gentiles.’ We used to look down on Gentiles as horrible sinners *until* Jesus revealed to us that *“for all (Jew and Gentile) have sinned and come short of the glory of God”* (Rom.3:23)—

- ¹⁶yet we know (Peter, you know it, and I know it) that a person is not justified (made right with God) by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Not by our works, not by our obedience – but by His works, and His obedience. He goes on—

- 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.”

“Peter, bro, you were a Galilean fisherman. I was a well-schooled Pharisee. Nothing in common, except our Jewishness. We were both working our way to heaven, you know that. But Jesus taught us both that we will never make it to heaven like that, and we “*believed in Christ Jesus*. We put our trust in His doing, not our doing, and we were made right with God, through faith in Christ, not by works of the law.”

*They actually *experienced* this! This was their testimony: “Apart from any good we had done, and in spite of all the bad we had done, God saved us through faith *in* Christ. Alone. *And we know it!*”

- Beloved this is the Gospel, and when God opens your eyes to see it, you know! When He does that to a poor farmer in Uganda, he knows. When He does it to a secular-atheist in Europe, he knows. When He does it to a devout Roman Catholic in South America, he knows. And when I was a godless 17 year old in rural Indiana and Jesus saved me, I knew it! I didn’t understand it, but I knew I was saved, and that it was because of Jesus. Even as a baby Christian I knew it wasn’t *because* of my goodness, and it was *in spite of* my badness!
- Jesus said, “My sheep know My voice, and they follow Me!” The Gospel breaks into a human heart like a bolt of lightning in a dark sky. It brings release from the burden of trying to be good enough to please God!
- Illustration: I just read the testimony of a young man who was brought up in this church – had read the Bible, listened to countless sermons – but it wasn’t until God opened his eyes that he said he “Hit his knees” and prayed for Jesus to be His Savior. And now he knows: he “*believed in Christ Jesus*, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.”

So I want you to understand that after rebuking Peter, Paul is now establishing the common ground they share in the Gospel. But the implication was this: “Peter, we share the same Gospel of grace – so how could you risk undoing confusing others by caving into legalism?”

Peter got it. He did. There is nothing in the rest of the NT to show that he held a grudge against Paul. And just shortly after this confrontation, Paul and Peter were together at the Jerusalem Council, and he stood up and made this speech—

- Acts 15:7–11 ⁷And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. ⁸And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, ⁹and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts *by faith*. ¹⁰Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor

we have been able to bear? ¹¹*But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.*"

Amazing statement: "My Jewish brothers, not only do Gentiles not have to come up to our level to be saved, we need to go down to theirs, and humbly receive God's free gift of grace!"

***Justified by faith in Christ**

One of the most important verses in your Bible is v.16, so I want us to take a minute to look at it. Three times, Paul says the same thing—

- Galatians 2:16 ¹⁶1.) yet we know that a person is *not* justified by works of the law but *through* faith in Jesus Christ, 2.) so we also have *believed* in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by *faith* in Christ and *not* by works of the law, 3.) because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Justification is the answer to Bildad's question: "How then can man be in the *right* before God?" God Himself has made a way for sinners to be right – justified – before Him: by trusting in Jesus Christ alone to be their righteousness before God. Let me give you 5 things you need to know about justification—

1.) Justification is God's legal decision.

It is God's declaration, His judgment as the Judge of the universe – that guilty sinners are forgiven all their sins and possess the righteousness of Jesus Christ, through *trusting* in His Son alone. This is a once-and-forever decision which cannot be overturned or appealed. When God justifies a person, He treats that person as He treats His own Son. He treats them as though they had never sinned.

2.) Justification has two parts.

It is the great exchange: All of our sins were put on Christ's account and He suffered and died to pay the penalty we deserved. All of His righteousness was put on our account. He got our sins, we get His righteousness.

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

And this is how God treats us! We still sin, but God sees us in His Son, and He loves and treats us as He loves and treats His own Son! One day this truth came home to John Bunyan —

- "One day, as I was passing into the field, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul: '*Your righteousness is in heaven.*' And I thought that I could see Jesus Christ at God's right hand. Yes, there indeed was my righteousness, so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say about me that I did not have righteousness, for it was standing there before Him. . . Now indeed the chains fell off my legs, and I was loosened from my afflictions and irons. My temptations also fled away . . . Now I went home rejoicing because of the grace and love of God, and . . . I lived here sweetly at peace with God through Christ for a long time. There was nothing but Christ before my eyes. I was not thinking of Him now only as concerning His blood, His burial or His resurrection, but I was thinking of Christ Himself, and that He sat there on the right hand of God in Heaven."

“Now, God the Just is satisfied, to look on Him, and pardon me!”

3.) Justification is by God's grace apart from our works.

This must be important if Paul says it three times in one verse: “Not by works, not by works, not by works!” Listen to how Paul put it in—

- Titus 3:5–7 ⁵he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. ⁶He generously poured out the Spirit upon us through Jesus Christ our Savior. ⁷Because of his grace he made us right in his sight and gave us confidence that we will inherit eternal life.

And throughout all of his letters Paul makes the point that grace and human works do not mix! If you *try* to contribute your own efforts, or goodness, you *forfeit* God's gift of grace—

- Galatians 5:4 ⁴You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. And the last verse in ch.2—
- Galatians 2:21 ²¹I do not nullify (cancel) the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

If your works play a part in your salvation, then it's no longer a gift of God's grace, and it makes Jesus' death unnecessary. “What do you mean?” Well if you could be good enough to please God, He wouldn't have crucified His Son – right?

4.) Justification is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Not *because* of. Faith is not a work that earns grace, faith is just the empty hand that receives God's gift. Faith simply looks to Jesus. If God says, “Why should I let you into My heaven?” – you just point to Jesus! You say, “It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me!” And God says, “Right answer.” But only if your faith is in Jesus alone – you can't offer up one shred of your own goodness: You can't point to Jesus – and yourself! You have to say, “Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to Thy cross I cling.”

5.) Justification means no more judgment.

I hope this thought rocks your world: In justification, God brings that great future Day of Judgment forward in time: When a sinner trusts Jesus, God gives His verdict, at that moment: Acquitted of all charges! Forgiven of all sins! Free in Christ! Your Judgment Day has come and gone so that—

- Romans 8:1 ¹There is therefore *now* no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

No condemnation! Justification = No more judgment. He brings it up again—

- Romans 8:33–34 ³³Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴Who 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.

Even in our human law courts, if the judge declares you acquitted of your crime, you can't be tried again for that crime. That's the law of double jeopardy. So if God Himself justifies you on the basis of the blood of His own Son, nothing can change that. Nothing can ever separate you from the love of God in Christ – forever, amen. Do you believe that? Listen to Jesus—

- John 5:24 ²⁴Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me *has* eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but *has* passed from death to life.

Do you see that? If you believe in Jesus, you already *have* eternal life – right now – you will not come into judgment because you *have already passed* from death to life. This is in the perfect tense: a past fact with continuing results: you will never face the judgment of God because you passed through it, in Christ, into eternal life.

Oh Charles Spurgeon preached this:

- “We are *today* accepted in the Beloved, *today* absolved from sin, *today* acquitted at the bar of God. We are *now* pardoned; even *now* are our sins put away; even *now* we stand in the sight of God accepted, as though we had never been guilty. . . .There is not a sin in the Book of God, even *now*, against one of His people. Who dares to lay anything to their charge? There is neither speck, nor spot, nor wrinkle, nor any such thing remaining upon any one believer in the matter of justification in the sight of the Judge of all the earth.”

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II. The conversation continues.

Now let's return to Paul's conversation with Peter and let me try to untangle this—

- ¹⁷But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be “sinners,” (that was the charge of the Judaizers) is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

These false teachers accused Peter and Paul of sinning for not keeping Moses – and that made Jesus look like a sinner too! Just a bunch of hypocritical lies. And Paul doesn't fall for it. He plants his feet – yes they are justified through faith in Christ alone. And he won't budge. He won't be intimidated even when they insult Christ. They were the sinners for adding to the Gospel – not he and Peter.

- Legalists always say: “Your Gospel is too easy! People will go wild. They will sin their brains out. If God really justifies bad people, then what's the use in being good?”

But don't be intimidated! Plant your feet on the true Gospel of God's grace, even when people twist and distort what you say.

- *I love what Martyn-Lloyd Jones said in his commentary on Romans: “There is no better test as to whether a man is really preaching the New Testament gospel of salvation than that some people might misunderstand it and misinterpret it to mean that it really amounts to this: that because you are saved by grace alone it does not matter at all what you do; you can go on sinning as much as you like because it will redound all the more to the glory of grace. If my preaching and presentation of the gospel of salvation does not expose it to that misunderstanding, then it is not the gospel.”*

- I remember once trying to share the Gospel with my dad. I told him that we aren't saved by keeping God's commands, but by trusting in Jesus. He did not like that! He said, "God wouldn't have given us the 10 commandments if He didn't expect us to keep them!" Of course my dad couldn't have named half the 10 commandments – but he just knew that we are saved by our own efforts and goodness.

Getting to heaven by being good – is so deeply imbedded in our flesh, isn't it? Only God can open our eyes to see that Christ alone is the only way to heaven. Paul goes on, and now he is talking to these legalists—

- ¹⁸For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

He's saying, "You legalists, I'm not sinning when I don't keep the Law of Moses, but if I bring *back* law-keeping (like what Peter did), then yes, I would be sinning against the grace and Gospel of God!"

We have said many times that many Jews fundamentally misunderstood the purpose of the Law of Moses: God gave the Law to be a **mirror** – to show us our sins and lead us to cry out to Him for mercy—

- Romans 3:20 ²⁰For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands. The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

But many Jews had turned the **mirror** into a **ladder** – a stairway to heaven! And they were determined to climb that ladder and get to heaven by their own righteousness—

- Romans 9:30–32 (NLT) ³⁰What does all this mean? Even though the Gentiles were not trying to follow God's standards, they were made right with God. And it was by faith that this took place. ³¹But the people of Israel, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. ³²Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law instead of by trusting in him. They stumbled over the great rock in their path. (Christ)

Beloved, the Gospel tore the ladder down! "For by the works of the law no one will be justified." Then he says—

- ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law, so that I might *live* to God.

When did Paul die to the Law? When Jesus died on the cross. Jesus' death finished the Law's demands, and in union with Him, Paul was finished with the Law –

- Think about what a change this was in Paul's life! The Law Moses used to be everything to him. His whole life was knowing the Law, keeping the Law, and judging others by how they did or didn't keep the law. But when he died to the Law in Christ, he was released from that bondage. He was dead to it. And the law has no jurisdiction over a dead person. Dead people don't get speeding tickets! Right?

And if you are in Christ, you are finished with the Law's demands. Your debt was paid, and you are no longer "*under the Law, but under grace!*"

But notice that what this meant to Paul was “*so that I might live to God*”—

***Crucified with Christ.**

Look at how Paul described his new life—

- ²⁰I have been crucified *with* Christ. It is 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.

Do you see the prepositions? “With, in, and for” Paul says, “Jesus gave Himself *for* me, the old me was crucified *with* Him. And now Christ lives *in* me. The old Paul is dead and gone, It’s not even I who lives but Jesus lives *in* me and *through* me. Honestly, it’s hard for me to know where Paul leaves off and Jesus begins!”

Is that the way you see yourself this morning? Beloved, I can tell you on the authority of Scripture, if your faith is in Jesus Christ, it’s the way God sees you—

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.
- You are new – in Christ. Let that sink in. Believe it. When Satan tempts you to think that you are still the same old person, you will never change, you tell yourself: “*It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me!*”
- When you surprise yourself by some sin that you never thought you were capable of, and you question how God (and others) could ever forgive you, you tell yourself: “*It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me!*”
- You might not be the person you *want* to be, but you are not the person you *used* to be, and by God’s grace you are not the person you one day *will* be – “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.”

How do you make this real in your life? Paul tells us: “And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, (You fix your mind and heart on Jesus – but what does that mean?) – “Who loved me and gave Himself *for* me.” The Lord Jesus Christ loves you! How do you know for certain? Look at the cross – He gave Himself for you. Beloved you are justified by faith, and crucified with Christ, and a new creature in Him.

When Satan tempts me to despair,
And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there,
Who made an end to all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died,
My sinful soul is counted free.
For God the just is satisfied,
To look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there the risen Lamb!
My perfect spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM,
The King of glory and of grace,
One with Himself I cannot die.
My soul is purchased by His blood,
My life is hid with Christ on high,
With Christ my Savior and my God!

My Dear friend who is now with the Lord, Steve Fernandez, wrote about preaching on justification to a group of pastor's in Honduras. He wanted them to know what a soul-liberating truth this is. Let me read you his account (pp.6-7 Free Justification)