

Justification By Faith Alone

Galatian 2:16-21

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Just a reminder, tonight we come to the end of the first of three main divisions of the book of Galatians. I'm kind of hammering that home every week because I want you to see the bigger outlay of the book. The first two chapters, and we finish chapter 2 tonight, are Paul dealing with defending his apostleship, so they are autobiographical. Paul is defending his apostleship. The reason he was defending his apostleship is because false teachers, known as Judaizers, had entered into the church at Galatia. They were not only attacking Paul's message, but they were attacking Paul the messenger. They figured if they could undermine the authority of the messenger, they could undermine the authority of the message. They were attacking Paul and his gospel.

In Galatians 3 and 4, we are going to move next week to the doctrinal section of the book of Galatians, even though tonight is transitional from the end of the autobiographical to the doctrinal. It's actually a fitting transition as Paul deals with the doctrine of justification, and you move into Galatians 3 and 4. Then, when we get to Galatians 5 and 6, they will be practical; and Paul will talk about how those who are justified by faith alone live the Christian life.

In our text, we are introduced to a very, very important word for the first time in the book of Galatians. That word is the word "justified," or justification. Look at it with me, verse 16. Paul says, "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Verse 16 is one of the greatest verses in the New Testament on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. As I said, we discover this important Bible word, that every Christian should understand, for the first time in the book of Galatians, the verb three times in verse 16, and once in verse 17; then the noun "justification" is found once more in verse 21, where in my King James translation it's translated righteousness, but it's the same word which could be translated justification. It's repeated several times—about five or six times—in just the text we are to cover tonight.

Paul is, in our passage, unfolding the great doctrine of justification by faith. It was this doctrine that started the fire of reformation in the heart of Martin Luther. Martin Luther said about this doctrine, "If this doctrine, justification, be once lost, then all the Christian doctrine is lost." If you lose the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone, then you lose Christian salvation—we are not saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. This doctrine is absolutely essential to Christianity. Someone said, "There are only really two religions so to speak, one is a religion of works—you get yourself to heaven by your good works—the other is the religion of God's grace—God saves you by His grace and you trust Him by faith to save you. There are only two ways to be saved, and the reality is only salvation by grace through faith in Christ can save. Works, we're going to see, cannot save an individual. There are not two ways to heaven—you work your way or God takes you there. There's really only one way to get to heaven, and that's by

being saved by faith in Christ by the grace of God.

This is a very, very important doctrine. It is fully delineated systematically and laid out in the book of Romans. The books of Galatians and Romans are like twin sisters of the Bible, they both go together where Paul actually lays out systematically the doctrine of justification by faith in the book of Romans but then defends it against false teachers who are attacking that doctrine in the book of Galatians. If you know of anyone that is struggling with legalism or antinomianism, they're against the law, then Galatians is the book for them. It's the book for us as well today.

What does justification mean? The term "justification," and we're going to jump into the text in just a moment but bear with me, is a legal term, a courtroom term, a forensic term. It just simply, literally means to declare righteous. In the book of Job the question is asked, "How can a man be right with God? How can we be declared by God to be righteous?" The opposite, to kind of understand it better, of justification is the word "condemnation." Now, if you are being tried in a courtroom, the judge, after the trial is over, has the power and authority to either condemn you or to justify you. The idea of condemnation means that you are guilty, that you are a sinner. The idea of justification is that you are declared righteous, and you are acquitted or forgiven. There's a difference between being forgiven and being justified. Being justified means that your standing, your position in Christ, means that you are perfectly righteous, you are declared to be righteous, you are positionally righteous; and that righteousness was imputed to you by your faith that you placed in Jesus Christ.

Let me give you, and I have memorized it years ago (I wish I could have got it earlier for you on the screen), a real great definition. It's given by Charles Ryrie in his book, Basic Theology, that I've hung onto for many years. You can do a whole study just based on this definition, but the definition is that justification—listen carefully—is the act of God whereby He, that is, God, declares the believing sinner to be righteous based on the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. Now, the definition I just gave may seem kind of basic or elementary or not that exciting, but every facet of that definition conveys an important truth about the doctrine of justification.

First, it's the act of God. Man cannot justify himself. God is the One who is the justifier. In Romans 3 (if we turn there in just a second), Paul says God is the justifier of them who believe, so God is also just in justifying. We have guilty sinners that rightfully should be condemned; but God declares them righteous, so God is the justifier. It is the act of God who justifies. The act of God indicates very, very importantly that it is not a process. I can't emphasize enough how important this point is. It would be like saying, "Hey, are you a Christian?" "Well, I'm trying to be." Or, "Are you saved?" "Well, I'm working at it." You're either saved or you're not. You don't grow into becoming a child of God, you're born into the family of God.

By the way, lest I forget tonight, when you are justified, that very moment you are born again. Theologically, the term is regenerated. I like to use that term, even though it sounds kind of big and theological, because a lot of times we have different concepts of what it means to be born again. To be born again, or regenerated, means that you are given new life. You're dead in

your trespasses and sins, you're separated from God. When you put your trust in Jesus to save you, not only are you declared righteous but the Holy Spirit comes inside of you, regenerates you, and gives you life. That's what constitutes being a Christian or not being a Christian. You're not a Christian because you go to church. You're not a Christian because you get baptized. You're not a Christian because you believe Christian things or know there's a God out there or you live a certain way. Christianity is the life of God in the soul of man. If you don't know Christ personally and have the Holy Spirit indwelling you powerfully, then you're not really a Christian, a child of God.

A Christian is one who has the life of God in their soul, and regeneration and justification happen the moment you believe. They happen simultaneously, and they are not a process. Again, because of that, once you've been declared righteous, you don't get more righteous positionally or more justified as time goes on—you're not super justified—you either are or you're not. The moment you are justified, you are declared perfectly righteous. It's not progressional. That comes with what's called sanctification. That's your practice. You're growing in the knowledge of your relationship with Jesus Christ and the likeness of Jesus Christ. I'll talk more about that in just a moment.

Justification is the act of God whereby He declares, notice in that definition "declares." He doesn't practically make you righteous (although He gives you the power and the ability because you have the Holy Spirit to live righteously, and evidence of regeneration will be a changed life), but it is God positionally declaring you to be righteous. One of the most important things for a Christian to realize is that you have a practice and a position. Your position is the moment you're saved, you're placed in Christ. You are perfectly righteous—your sin was paid for on the cross, and Christ's righteousness was imputed to you. You're never going to be more righteous than you are right at that moment. But practically—sanctification—you will grow in likeness and holiness to Jesus Christ as time goes on. It's not a process. It's something God does instantaneously. He declares you positionally to be righteous.

Now, He does that because you put your faith in Jesus Christ, not because you are baptized or take communion or you're circumcised, with the argument of the false teachers in the book of Galatians, or following dietary laws, worshiping on certain holy days, new moons, or sabbath days. Ceremonial laws and law keeping cannot justify the guilty sinner. It's the work of your faith in Jesus. All of what God does in justifying the guilty sinner is based on the finished work of Jesus Christ who died on the cross. It's all about what God did in Christ, and you're trusting in that finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross. It's so very, very important.

Let me rip through some other points about justification before we even start into our text. The doctrine of justification in the New Testament is described several ways. First, its source is God, Romans 3:26. Secondly, its essence is God's grace, Romans 3:24. Thirdly, its means is faith, Romans 5:1, and we get that tonight in Galatians—being justified therefore by faith we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Fourthly, its ground is the blood of Christ, Romans 5:9; its position is in Christ, 1 Corinthians 6:11; and its divine agency is the Holy Spirit, 1 Corinthians 6:11, He's the One who places us in Christ; and its evidence, James 2:21, is good

works. The book of James is another important book where it's arguing that if you truly have been justified, and you are a child of God, then it will be manifested by the way you live in your righteous deeds. Works do not save us, but they are an indication that we are truly saved.

In this passage tonight, we're going to see two basic things: Paul expounds the doctrine of justification by faith alone, verse 16; and then Paul, verses 17-21, argues the doctrine critically by dealing with his critics, their arguments against him, and his arguments against them, verse 21. Go back with me to verse 16. This is the one verse where Paul is basically expounding the doctrine of justification by faith. He says, "Knowing that," I want to make sure I point out that, beginning back in Galatians 2:11, Paul was dealing with this conflict he had with Simon Peter in Antioch. We looked at it last week, how Peter came from Jerusalem to the church in Antioch where Paul was. He was eating, drinking, and hanging out with Gentile believers who were uncircumcised, accepting them as brothers in Christ. Then, certain came from Jerusalem, probably the Judaizers, and when Peter saw them show up he freaked out and separated himself from the Gentiles. What he did was stumbled other people who were led astray by his hypocrisy and inconsistency, so he was a bad example. By his actions, he was actually saying that the Judaizers, the false teachers, were correct and Paul was wrong. Paul had to stand up to him and rebuke him to his face, and we looked at that, verses 11-15.

Notice in verse 14 where Paul says, "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly," that is, Peter, Barnabas, and all those who followed Peter in his hypocrisy, "according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all," notice Paul is speaking and confronting Peter in front of the church, "If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles," I read that because as you move to verse 16, there is no break. Paul is still talking to Peter. As you go into verse 16, you need to keep in mind that though Paul is writing to the Galatians, he is now summarizing what he actually said to Peter.

It's very possible (can't be dogmatic about it) that from verses 16-21 are actually all Paul's words to Peter, that it's actually a summary of his confrontation with Peter over this issue because it was a very, very important issue. He couldn't have just said, "Oh, well, Peter's a heavyweight, and he was an apostle long before me. I'm not going to worry about it." No. Paul says, "This is important because either you're right or you're wrong; and if you're right, then the gospel that I preach is wrong and we're in big trouble—we're not saved by grace, we must all become Jews in order to be saved," but Paul says, "No, you're wrong. That's not the gospel, and we can't dilute the gospel either by our preaching or by our conduct or by our behavior."

A lot of times people believe in the gospel of God's grace but deny it by the way they live or conduct their lives and cause other people to stumble, and that's truly sad. I just wanted to point out that he's still talking to Peter, that's why he uses the opening phrase in verse 16, "Knowing that," he's actually saying, "Peter, you know this. Peter, you've preached the gospel. You know that we're saved by grace through faith in Christ," so he says, "Knowing that," or some translations have, "We know," "a man," the man there in verse 16 is referring to all of humanity. It's talking about mankind, and everything Paul says here is universal. It doesn't matter if you're

a Jew or Gentile, male or female, slave or a free man, Greek or Scythian, we're all saved the same way and become one in the body of Christ.

Paul says, "...a man is not," he starts by giving a general principle in verse 16 that is negative, that we are, "not justified by the works of the law," stop right there. I don't really know what more I need to say. It's in the Bible, right? What does it say? It says we're "...not justified by the works of the law." Now, we could quibble over the works of the law and what they mean: Is that the moral law or the ceremonial law? Is that just the Ten Commandments or is that the whole Old Testament? I believe that it includes all of those. There's nothing that you can do—keep the Ten Commandments as long as you want—you're not really going to be able to because Jesus said that if you look lustfully after someone you've already committed adultery in your heart; if you have anger in your heart towards somebody, that you've already murdered them. It's pretty clear that we're all guilty of breaking God's commandments, that it's not just given to govern our outward actions, it's given to govern our inward attitude. The person today that thinks, "Well, I'm living good enough," or "I'm keeping the law good enough," or "I'm gonna get to heaven because I keep the Ten Commandments," is self deceived and obviously hasn't realized they are a sinner before God. The fact that we are all sinners born in Adam under condemnation stands to show us that we cannot save ourselves. We can't pull ourselves up by our own bootstraps. That's just simply the negative. The law cannot justify the guilty sinner, so we're not justified by the works of the law. There's nothing you can do to save yourself.

Nicodemus came to Jesus in John 3. If anyone could get to heaven, like Saul of Tarsus, Nicodemus would get to heaven yet was conscious of his need and said, "What must I do to inherit the Kingdom of God?" What do I need to do to get to go to heaven? Jesus told Nicodemus, "You have to be born again. You have to be born from above. You need to be regenerated by the Holy Spirit." Even this very religious Jew, this Pharisee, sensed his need of a Savior, and Jesus explained, "It's not by Judaism or by your works of the law, but it's by being born of the Holy Spirit which comes through faith in Jesus Christ." Paul gives them the negative: We're not justified by the works of the law.

There's a lot of people today that say you have to be baptized to go to heaven, you have to be a member of this certain denomination to go to heaven, you have to live a certain way if you're going to go to heaven, you have to do certain rites or rituals or, "If you don't worship on this special day of the week, you're not going to go to heaven." You cannot be justified by the works of the law.

Then, Paul gives them the positive: How are we justified? "...that we might be justified by the faith of Christ," that faith of Jesus Christ is the same concept of in Jesus Christ or upon Jesus Christ, so it's your faith and trust in Christ alone. It's like the hymn we sing, Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy cross I cling. I don't come boasting, "Well, look at my spiritual pedigree," or "Look at my race," or "Look at my creed," or "Look at my conduct." It's just basically Christ died for me. The positive, in the middle of verse 16, is "...but by the faith of Jesus Christ," and he adds to that, "even we have believed in Jesus Christ." Now he gets a little more personal and uses the word "we" twice in the middle of verse 16, so he's including all the Jewish brethren

with him, all the believers with him, that we are saved by our faith or our belief, verse 16, in Christ Jesus, "that we might be justified," so he makes it personal, "by the faith of Christ," and then again he comes back to the negative, "and not by the works of the law."

The reason verse 16 is so powerful, because he repeats it three times. We're not saved by works of the law, we're saved by believing in Jesus by faith; and then he comes back again and says we are not saved "by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." When he closes verse 16, he makes it universal. No one can be saved by the works of the law, "...no flesh shall be justified."

The last statement in verse 16, "no flesh shall be justified," is taken from Psalm 143:2. In that psalm he doesn't use the term justified or saved, but the psalmist actually says that man cannot be just before God. There are two things that are fundamental to understanding the gospel: 1) God is righteous, pretty foundational; 2) man is sinful. One of the big problems in our culture today is we don't believe that man is a sinner. We're trying to do all these things politically, socially, economically, and educationally to try to improve man. Wouldn't you think that mankind would be smart enough by now to realize we haven't been able to change men's hearts? Why is it that we think that we can still create a utopian society? It's insane. Man has not changed. Man is sinful, rebellious, in enmity with God, and needs to be reconciled, redeemed, justified before a holy righteous God.

Works of the law cannot make that happen, and we cannot do it by our own good deeds, which are the works of the law, but can only happen by the faith of Christ not by the works of the law, "...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." When Paul makes that last statement, he's making it very clear that it's universal. Don't make the mistake that Gentiles can be saved by faith through grace, but Jews have to be religious, keep laws and rules, or that we break the doctrine of God's grace or salvation into different groups, different gospels. No, there's only one gospel.

I want you to hold your place here in Galatians and turn with me real quick (I can't resist this, and I probably shouldn't do this, but here we go) to Romans 3. I want to give you seven marks of justification from this text. I know that we've taught it before, but I want to remind you of them. In Romans 3:20, Paul comes to the end of this first section in Romans where he wraps up his teaching on justification and says, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight," he quotes the exact psalm that he just quoted in the book of Galatians, "for by the law is the knowledge of sin." Here's the first point, verse 20, we are not justified by the law.

The second point is in verse 22, "Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ," we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. At the end of verse 22, the third point on justification is "...unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference," there is no differentiation between Jew or Gentile, male or female, different cultures or ethnic groups. It's universal. We just got that in the book of Galatians. It's not by law, it's through faith in Christ. It's for everyone.

Then notice at the opening of verse 24, “Being justified freely by his grace,” so that tells us that our justification is based on the grace of God, that we’re saved by God’s grace—unearned, undeserved, unmerited favor. Notice at the end of verse 24, and down into verse 25, “through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,” so that definition I gave earlier about the basis of God justifying the unrighteous is the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross, “Whom God hath set forth to be the propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God.” The fifth point is justification is at a great cost to God. Salvation is a free gift, but it’s very costly—it cost God the death of His own Son upon the cross.

The sixth point about justification is in verse 26, that is, it’s done in perfect justice. “To declare,” in light of the cross, “I say, at this time his righteousness: that he,” that is, God, “might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.” God is just in justifying the unjust because our penalty was paid for by Jesus Christ upon the cross.

The seventh and last, verse 27, it excludes boasting. Justification by faith and grace of God excludes or eliminates boasting. “Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.” Then, notice the conclusion, verse 28, “Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.” You’re probably saying, “Well, why didn’t you just preach from Romans tonight instead of Galatians?” I don’t know. I’ve always loved that Romans passage, and it’s just so packed. It’s really an important doctrine, and I thought I would take the time to turn there with you in your Bible.

Now, beginning in verse 17, this is where it gets challenging, to verses 20-21, Paul argues basically a hypothetical case of the argument of his antagonist. These verses, you probably can tell already, are challenging, difficult, and hard to interpret. I’m smiling just a little bit because I’m not sure how they should be interpreted. I know the gist of what’s going on, but I’m not real clear on which of two important ways to interpret these verses we should take. Let’s read from verses 17-21, and then we’ll go back and unpack it. As I said, Paul is anticipating the arguments of his doctrine with the false teachers. He says, “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin?” notice the question mark, “God forbid,” or perish the thought. Paul is kind of giving a hypothetical argument, no doubt, about what his antagonists or false teachers were thinking; and if they’re right, then we’re messengers of sin to preach that we’re saved by merely faith in Jesus Christ.

Verse 18, Paul continues, “For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 20 I am crucified with Christ,” you’re familiar with that verse, “nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” Go back with me to verse 17.

There are two ways to interpret verses 17-18. The first way is Paul hypothetically anticipating an argument of his antagonists, the Judaizers. That argument is basically, “Okay, if we are saved by our good works and Gentiles have to be saved by good works and become Jews—

they have to be circumcised and keep the law of Moses—then what you're saying is," Paul didn't believe this but would be saying, "that we are actually causing people to sin by telling them not to keep the law, not to be circumcised, not to become Jews to be saved, that just simply believing in Jesus, trusting in Jesus, and everything will be okay," and that would be the reasoning. Paul is actually anticipating this reasoning and saying how inconsistent it would be to think that Christ would lead us to do or to believe something that is sinful behavior. In other words, if Paul's gospel is wrong, and the Judaizers' message is right, then the people who preach the gospel that Paul was preaching, say of salvation or justification by grace alone, are actually introducing people to sin—sinful behavior. How does Paul dismiss it? He immediately dismisses his own hypothetical argument, "Perish the thought," "God forbid." Don't even think of such a thing.

The other possibility of interpretation, if I haven't completely confused you already, is that, and he does teach this in the book of Romans when he's teaching the doctrine of justification by faith, in Romans 6 he anticipates the antagonist, or false teachers, and Paul would do this. He would kind of argue with himself hypothetically in his letters. He is anticipating the argument, "Well, Paul," this is what we see a lot of today, "if you're saved by grace through faith and you can just believe in Jesus and ask Him in your heart and you get to go to heaven, and you're going to be saved, gonna be justified, then what's to keep me from then believing in Jesus and then going out and living however I want? What's to keep me from sinning and doing whatever I want? If I want to steal, lie, cheat, get drunk, commit sexual immorality—however I want to live—I can just say, 'I believed in Jesus.'" How many times have you met people, "Are you a Christian?" "Oh yeah, I'm a Christian," but they're living contrary to the Christian life or to God's Word. "Well, I believe in Jesus Christ," or "I asked Jesus in my heart."

In Romans 6, Paul says, "Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" What's Paul's answer? "God forbid," perish the thought. Don't even think such a thing. It's that point, by the way, the he goes on to answer in the latter half of this chapter; so, most likely, the second concept, because Paul wrote about it in Romans, could be the way to interpret that, that he's actually saying, "You legalists are arguing that we open the door to sinful behavior because we have some call an easy believism, or you just put your faith in Jesus." Even non-Christians will mock that concept. They think, If you're going to go to heaven, you gotta work for it! You gotta really dig deep, be a good person, and don't do this and don't do that. Wear Christian clothes and get a Christian haircut and go to Christian church, eat Christian food, speak Christian language. You gotta be a good person to go to heaven.

Do you know that everyone who goes to heaven is a redeemed sinner? When we get to heaven, no one is going to be strutting around bragging about, "Wow! Do you know what I did to get here?" Ain't gonna happen. We're all going to be on our faces worshiping Jesus, who alone is worthy, who redeemed us by His blood. Amen? Out of every kindred, tribe, people, and nations, we're all saved the same way. Every time, throughout the ages of the church, we're all saved the same way.

We're going to see in the doctrinal section of Galatians Abraham was saved the same way. He

believed God before he was circumcised, before the law was given or the Ten Commandments. Before there was a nation of Israel, Abraham believed God, and God imputed to him righteousness by faith. That's the promise of Abraham, by the way, that you get justified by believing in God. Most likely, and I can't be sure, that may be the concept, Romans 6:1, "... Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?" The false teachers might be saying, "Well, you're just opening the door for sinful behavior, this teaching of God's grace and we're not under law."

A lot of people like that concept today. They believe that we're saved by trusting Jesus but we have to keep the law, try to live a good life in order to save ourselves, and work with God's grace in order to be saved. It's a combination of believing in Jesus and saved by grace plus works. This is why I emphasize justification by faith alone. It's not justification by faith and church attendance. It's not justification by faith and water baptism. It's not justification by faith and dietary laws or worshiping on certain holy days. It's justification by faith alone in Christ alone by grace alone. That's how we're saved. The moment you add any works to that, then it is no longer faith alone, grace alone, in Christ alone. We're going to see that as we finish up this important chapter. He says, "God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."

It could be also, as I pointed out, Paul's talking to Peter; and Peter's the one who went back to his old behavior. It's interesting. From Acts 10, when he went to Cornelius' house and God showed him with a vision that Gentiles could be saved, and he's not to call anything common or unclean, yet he still stumbled and fell from the fear of man and went back with the Judaizers. It was a very, very dangerous moment.

Verse 19, Paul says, "For I through the law am dead to the law," now Paul deals with this issue of when you become a Christian, saved by grace through faith, it doesn't mean that you can live however you want to. When you were saved, you, through the law, become dead to the law. The demands of the law were paid for you by the person of Christ on the cross. Jesus came to live a perfect, sinless life and keep every jot and tittle of the law. Do you know the life that people think they can try to live to get to go to heaven was lived by Jesus Christ? That's why we need His righteousness given to us as a free gift. Not only did He live righteously, He died substitutionarily. He took your place, so His life and His death bring about that salvation. He kept the law perfectly and died on the cross in our place substitutionarily, so Jesus could be our only Savior.

Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ," I don't know if you noticed, verses 18-21, all the personal pronouns, "I." Paul is talking about himself and his relationship to Christ. He's still combating the arguments of these Judaizers. He says, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Verse 20, we know well and love, is one of the great descriptions of the Christian life. Notice, verse 20, there's no mention of keeping the Ten Commandments or following dietary laws. It's just, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I," it's not me anymore, it's Christ in me. This is what Christianity is. The is the

description of what the Christian life is. The Christian life is all about Christ. If you are relating your Christian life to law, rules, and legalism, then you're not experiencing biblical Christianity. The Christian life is related to Christ, and the life of Christ in your soul—Christ living in you and through you.

Verse 20 is known as the doctrine of our identification with Christ or our identification in Christ. Paul's favorite term for the believer is the term, "in Christ." He uses it all through his New Testament epistles. Again, if you don't understand what it means to be "in Christ," you'll not understand what it means to be a Christian. The moment you put your faith in Christ, you're regenerated and taken by the Holy Spirit out of Adam, and the condemnation that is in Adam, and you are translated to being "in Christ." That's all a work of God by the Spirit instantaneously the moment you are born again. You don't have to, "I gotta get myself in Christ. I gotta read more chapters. I gotta go to church more. I gotta go to Wednesday night service, and then I'll pop out of Adam and I'll pop into Christ. I just slipped out of Christ and slipped back into Adam." I believe that once you're in Christ, you're always in Christ. You didn't put yourself there, and you cannot take yourself out of Christ. The Holy Spirit put you in Christ, and He's not going to take you out. You're also sealed with the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption.

I know that Christians argue about, "Once saved, always saved," and "Can you lose your salvation?" I think it's because they don't understand these concepts. If you're saved, you're in Christ; if you're not in Christ, you're not saved. If you're in Christ, you didn't put yourself in Christ, the Holy Spirit put you in Christ and sealed you until the day of redemption, and there's nothing in the Bible that would indicate anything you do can get you out of Christ. That's amazing!

Now, again, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" "Whoa! I love this preaching, Pastor John. I'm going to go get drunk tonight." Then you haven't really been crucified with Christ and to the affections and lusts of the flesh. You are not really living for Christ, "...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Why do you live for Jesus? Because He loves you and gave His life for you. Because He has declared me righteous. He's made me His child. He's put me into Christ. He's taken me out of Adam. The list could go on and on and on of all the things that happened to you the moment you believed.

So many times we put the emphasis on what we did, "Oh, I trusted Jesus and put my faith in Him! I got a strong faith!" Three months later, "I don't believe anymore. I turned my back. He didn't heal me. He didn't do what I wanted." We put so much emphasis on, "Well, I received salvation, and I can give it back." That's not what the Bible teaches. Something actually happened to you the moment you were saved. It wasn't just that you believed, something actually happened to you. You were regenerated. You were indwelt. You were taken out of Adam and placed into Christ. You were sealed with the Spirit until the day of redemption. All of that is a work that God does. You can't do it, and you can't undo it. It's a work of God's Spirit, and that's what Paul is saying here in verse 20, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live."

I died. The old John Miller died. This is why Paul uses the imagery of baptism in Romans 6. Those of us who were baptized into Christ were baptized unto His death. Once Christ was risen from the dead, the passage where Christ died, so when we baptize people, we're baptizing them in identification with Christ. The water is your grave. You're putting the old man under, and when you come out of the water you're being resurrected with Christ. God saw you in Christ on the cross, God saw you buried, God saw you resurrected, God saw you ascended with Christ, and He saw you seated with Christ in the heavenly places. Read Ephesians 1 where Paul so powerfully delineates all the blessings of the Spirit that are ours in Christ from God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit—powerful stuff.

Paul says, "For me to live now is Christ," and where he's headed to wrap up this verse, verse 21, is basically saying, "When you're really in Christ and you're really a Christian, you're going to live for Christ. He loves you, you love Him. You're going to want to obey and serve Him." Works are not in order to earn, merit, or deserve salvation; they are the fruit and the evidence of you being a true child of God. One is the root of salvation, and the other is the fruit. Your faith, trust, in Christ and then the fruit is the evidence by the way that you live, "For me to live is Christ," and, Paul said, "who gave himself for me," what a blessing that is. The Christian life is Christ—Christ in me, lived by faith, lived for Jesus Christ.

Paul then closes and argues to his critics. He says, "I do not frustrate," the word "frustrate" in my King James translation is nullify or make void, "the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain." This is a powerful closing argument. Paul says, "I don't want to nullify God's grace because if you Judaizers are right, if righteousness, if justification could come by the law, then Christ is died in vain."

If you could do something to get yourself to heaven, then why did Jesus die on the cross? Remember when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane and said, "Father, if it's possible for this cup to pass—drinking this cup of Your wrath, taking the sin of the world on the cross—if it's possible for You to redeem mankind any other way than Me going to the cross, let it be. Nevertheless, not as I will but as Thou will." It wasn't possible. Jesus went to the cross. If you could meditate and get to heaven, Jesus didn't have to die. If you could be baptized and go go heaven, Jesus didn't have to die. If you could follow dietary laws and get to go to heaven, Jesus didn't have to die. If you could just worship on certain holy days, be baptized, why did Jesus have to die? He's died in vain. The death of Christ was not necessary. You nullify the purpose of the cross of Jesus Christ. Christianity is all about the grace of God and the death of Christ for sinful man. It's rooted in the nature of God being love and God's grace and the work of Christ on the cross for us. So, "For to me to live is Christ," Paul said, "and to die is gain." He said, "If Christ's death wasn't for our salvation, then He died in vain."

Let me give you four real quick arguments to summarize what we covered tonight. First, man's greatest need is justification. Mankind's greatest need is to be justified before a holy God—sinful man being right before a holy God. Secondly, justification is not by works of the law but through faith in Christ. Thirdly, not to trust Jesus because of self trust is an insult to the grace of God and to the cross of Christ. Do you realize when you reject the cross of Christ and try to

work your way to heaven, that you're actually insulting God and His grace? Fourthly, to trust in or believe in Jesus Christ is to become united to Him, is to have new life in Jesus Christ.

Remember when Paul said in Ephesians, "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast." Then, he also said, "For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them." It's not teaching that we don't live righteously, but it's teaching that we don't work to be saved. Works are an evidence of our salvation, not the meriting or the cause of our salvation. We're saved by faith alone, in Christ alone, by the grace of God alone. Amen?