

*Sermon on Galatians 2:15-21 prepared by Jonathan Shradar*

**Our rescue by Jesus gives us eyes to see our sin and the power to live for something better.**

**Galatians 2:15–21** “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. [20] I 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. [21] I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” (ESV)

**Our rescue by Jesus gives us eyes to see our sin and the power to live for something better.**

This week I have been thinking about spoiled kids. Maybe it's the thick of summer and the loose schedules... maybe it is something deeper!

Being a parent gives you so much insight into the soul! Much of parenting, if you care for your kids, is keeping children from making dumb decisions - with the hopes that one day they will make good decisions for themselves and others!

When a child asks the parent “Can I eat all this ice cream?” And you respond, “You probably CAN eat all of that, but if you do it will make you sick so you shouldn’t eat all that ice cream.” You may have the ability to do something but for your good you shouldn’t do it.

A spoiled kid though would be given the ice cream and never learn that the sickness that follows can’t be cured by more ice cream.

The worst adults were spoiled children. And it's not all about ice cream - substitute your thing for it. Let the hearer understand!

Still, there is hope for us. To get healthy and stay healthy. And hope for when we binge too much and have to learn again how life works. How it is supposed to work.

Here Paul is telling Peter and the gathered church that what he has been doing will make him sick - it actually makes him condemned. So as we dive in, we want to recognize the remedy for our spoiling and cling to the hope that gets us over the mountains of life.

Most of us are familiar with the situation by now in our study of Galatians. Paul is writing to a group of churches that have been negatively influenced by some false teachers that declare you have to submit to the moral law of Judaism in order to be a true Christian. Effectively removing half the church at this point.

Paul calls it out for what it is, a tainted, non-gospel. And in doing so he recounts how the temptation is real to essentially reject the work of Jesus on the cross as enough for salvation. He tells of how Peter, the great Apostle, succumbed to fear of the circumcision party and stopped eating and fellowshiping with "Gentile sinners" as they called brothers and sisters.

Who knows what the church would look like if Paul hadn't confronted Peter. Drawing him back from hypocrisy. Who knows what will become of us if we aren't brought back from the edge ourselves...

In our text Paul brings to the front the rescue of Jesus and what it means for how we live - how we face what we can do and what we should do.

As we talk through this, I just want to ask two questions that the Scripture helps us answer. Here is the first:

### **What So Good About Justification?**

Paul shifts his language in unpacking the gospel to that of a legal nature. Justification.

Is this just a churchy word that we throw about every once in a while so people can see how reformed we are? Or is it truly at the core of who we are in Christ?

“Justified by faith” is central to the Christian faith. It is Paul’s nutshell summary of the gospel. But we often assume that we (and everyone else) have grasped what it means, and what impact it will have on our lives. And even in saying we mustn’t assume we all understand it, we often forget to spell out what it is!” Tim Keller

The dictionary definition is: “the action of showing something to be right or reasonable.”

“To ‘justify’ in the Bible means... to declare... of a man on trial, that he is not liable to any penalty, but is entitled to all the privileges due those who have kept the law. Justifying is the act of a judge pronouncing the opposite sentence to condemnation - that of acquittal and legal immunity.” J.I. Packer

For the Christian then, to be justified is to be acceptable for fellowship with God.

But this isn’t just a Christian concept. I do think it is best understood and realized in Jesus, but all of humanity lives trying to achieve justification. Maybe it is not even in the context of standing before God. But all of us, subconsciously and otherwise, live to find justification, approval, and arrival. Getting someone else to declare us good and right... or taking that role ourselves against all others, self-justifying our choices, our thinking, and our god-like status!

Oh how dangerous this is on the Cosmic scale. That there is a God who is unique and beyond us, who brought all life and established a standard of living before him. Humanity’s inability to live that standard according to plan then preceded the incarnation - This Creator taking on flesh, living among us and keeping the standard with perfection, dying an innocent death to cover our guilt, to justify us so that we can stand before God.

We believe this to be true... so where we are justified is vitally important. Being approved by God is the only thing that will match the longing in our souls, and oh how I pray we have the eyes to see that!

“The opposite of “justified” is “condemned”. Justification means that in Christ, though we are actually sinners, we are not under condemnation. God accepts us

despite our sin. We are not acceptable to God because we actually become righteous: we become actually righteous because we are acceptable to God.” Tim Keller

Something exclusively found in Jesus. Every other path turns in on itself and brings death, ruin.

**John 14:6** “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” (ESV)

A way open to the worst of us... those that have no hope, that have tried the other ways of justification and failed...

**Romans 5:6–8** “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. [7] For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—[8] but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.” (ESV)

“It is good to remind ourselves of who we are in ourselves, apart from Christ, and especially good for those who are, in a sense, Christians by birth. It’s good for us to not lose sight of the fact that we are by nature children of wrath, not children of God.” Todd Wilson

But God...

The problem in Paul’s day was that those gaining justification in Christ were neglecting it and fearing man, turning to works righteousness, the idea that I can find justification if I am good enough, do the right things.

The problem in our day isn’t all that far off. In a culture of self-justification, rampant among those that don’t know God and it seeps into the church and we don’t think the cross is enough to give us a place before God, or that that is even important. And it leads to condemnation. It puts us further away from what we were made for.

**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.” (ESV)

Many times I feel like my parenting extends to the pulpit... I have tried the other ways - going after what “felt right” at the time - attempting to live “my truth” - to go after what I “deserved.” And it all leads to wreckage, to more desperation, to more discontent.

Jesus looks at us in the worst and says “mine!” Declared righteous in him.

While we were still sinners Christ died for us.

This is what the hype is about. Justification through faith in Jesus Christ.

**1 Corinthians 6:9–11** “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, [10] nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. [11] And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.” (ESV)

What good news! “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.”

That's the first question, what's so good about justification? And the second follows from it.

## How do We Live Now?

Paul’s plea is that we don’t fall back into old patterns of self-justification. At least we aren’t supposed to...

**Galatians 2:17–18** *If someone who knows they are justified by faith sins, is it because justification-by-faith-in-Christ promotes sin? Not at all! But if someone who professes faith in Christ keeps on with the same sinful lifestyle, rebuilding the sinfulness that Christ died to destroy the penalty for, making no effort to*

*change, then it proves that this person never really grasped the gospel, but was just looking for an excuse to live in disobedience to God.*

We can end up denying justification in two ways:

I can reject it by trying to perform, remaining convinced that God relates to me on the basis of my ability to keep up appearances or meet a standard we set for ourselves, rather than on the basis of Christ's work (even when we are familiar with the theological truth of it - hypocrisy runs deep).

Or I can see the task of following Jesus as impossible, too in the way of my preference or little god status. So I just go with the flow of the cultural stream back into condemnation - just throwing up my hands and saying what the hell!

Both ways are rebuilding what was torn down. Denying and rejecting the justification that is only found in Christ.

Instead, justification in Christ frees us to live a crucified life. To face the hardest things in life as mountains to climb by the grace of God.

Clinging to our justification, resisting the lure of self-justification and the approval of man, fighting sin in our lives - none of it is easy. Living for others isn't easy. But we are not just left to it in our own strength or willpower, we have ammo for it.

This is maybe the most important verse in Galatians...

**Galatians 2:20** “I 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.” (ESV)

Our sinfulness, or skewed views of identity, our attempts at justification apart from Jesus, all the gunk of our souls and lives, it all died on the cross with Christ.

Christ and his righteousness now live in us, shaping us, empowering us, making us like him.

Our acceptance gives us a new and stronger motive for obeying God than justification by works ever could.

And this isn't just a generic accessible acceptance. The cross was not something done for you only if you come to it... Paul makes clear here that the cross of Christ was personal in nature.

If you are in Christ, if you believe in him, have found justification and real life in him, it is because he loved you and died for you. Personally.

I can't tell you how many times this has kept me... to know that I am not just a number but a loved one.

Think of it this way: A boat is sinking, everyone gets off safe, yet I say "let me show you how much I love you," and jump on to die going down with the boat (explosion or not) you will think, 'what a tragic waste of a life.'

But if the boat is sinking and your kids are on it, and I say "let me show you how much I love you," jumping on and rescuing your kids but ended up perishing myself, you would think, 'look at how much that man loved us.'

This is us in Christ, he has rescued us by giving himself for us, personally.

"By faith, we are united both to the death and the life of Christ—free from our past sin by union with his death, and free to live for him by union with his life. The false teachers were nullifying God's love graciously provided in this union by seeking to supplement Christ's death and resurrection (v. 21) with works of the law." GTB

This is the juice we need to make it up the mountains. Even when it's hard.

"The heart of gospel-rooted living is cruciformity. Life in Christ is all about being crucified with Christ... We shouldn't be surprised if we suffer a little mistreatment in the service of the gospel. There's a price to be paid for gospel ministry (life). And if we're not willing to pay that price, then we're unlikely to see the gospel advance through our lives. But if we want to see the gospel go forward, it's going to require of us cruciformity. We will be conformed to the cross." Todd Wilson

Even when we sin the grace of Christ carries us... because he died on purpose!

The way we do it, we make it to the summit, is by so filling ourselves with Christ that he becomes our defining passion.

“If you had access to all the latest machinery in a sophisticated science lab, what would be the most effective way to get all the air out of a glass beaker? One ponders the possible ways to suck the air out and create a vacuum. Eventually, the answer is given: fill it with water.” Piper

Thomas Chalmers, a Scottish minister in the 1800’s, taught of finding the expulsive power of a new affection - being so filled with Christ that he directs our lives and joy.

Chalmers “says there are two ways one might seek to remove this controlling affection from the heart. One is to show that the world is not worthy of our affection and will let us down in the end. (This argument corresponds to using a pump to suck the air out of the beaker.)

The other is to show that Jesus is vastly more worthy of the heart’s attachment, thus awakening a new and stronger affection that displaces the former affection for the world. (This corresponds to pouring water into the beaker to displace the air.) Hence “the expulsive power of a new affection.”

“Such is the grasping tendency of the human heart, that it must have a something to lay hold of — and which, if wrested away without the substitution of another something in its place, would leave a void and a vacancy as painful to the mind, as hunger is to the natural system.” Thomas Chalmers

The way to live without hypocrisy, without the fear of man, without the ravages of sin, is to find this better affection in response to Christ’s work and love for us. That he would so fill that every other love would flow from him.

This is what Paul is inviting Peter back into, this is what he longs for the Galatians churches to find, and it is what we need more than ever.

Every other path leads further into bondage - the way of Jesus leads to freedom, security, and eternity with him.

Which way will you choose?

**Our rescue by Jesus gives us eyes to see our sin and the power to live for something better.**

**Colossians 2:6–7** “Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, [7] rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving.” (ESV)

God is not done rescuing the spoiled children - he is still coming after us.

May the justification found in Jesus be our thing - that we could say of our lives that “it is not I who live but Christ who lives in me.”