
**"Justification by Faith, Part 2"
(Galatians 2:11-21)
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¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

¹⁵ "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

¹⁹ "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Introduction:

Welcome everyone and Happy Easter. We're so glad that all of you are here. If you're new here, we welcome you and if we haven't seen you in some time, we're glad you're back.

To catch you up, we're at the tail end of a short series on what is perhaps the most important doctrine not only in all of Christianity, but perhaps the entire world. And this doctrine is based on the greatest event in all of human history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, which is what we are celebrating today. The doctrine that I am talking about is Justification by Faith Alone. This doctrine is what actually makes Christianity unique among all of the other religions and worldviews.

Every other religion and perhaps even all non-religious worldviews, have as their general operating principle, a system of merits. Clubs are like that too. You pay your dues. You fill out an application. You pay your application fee. Jobs aren't just handed out. You have to list your credentials.

If you consider a person's entire lifespan, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say that 90% of those years is based on a system of merits. Beginning from age 2, our parents started making deals with us. If you pick up your toys, then you'll get a treat. If you get good grades, mommy will buy you a toy. If you do well in school, you'll get a good job. If you do well in your job, you'll get a nice spouse, you'll get a fat cheque, you'll live in a great neighborhood, and drive a nice car. If you're good to your friends, they'll be good to you. That principle runs throughout most of our lives.

It's the principle of all the religions. If you're good to God, God will be good to you, he'll let you in, he'll accept you. But there are two periods in a person's life, generally speaking where we really don't operate on that principle, and we hope others won't look at us based on that principle. Those are the months prior to and shortly after being born, and the very latter years of life. The unborn child and the newly born child have no merit, unless being cute and alive can be counted as such. They've contributed nothing to society; they haven't done a single good deed. As well, when we look at the aged, they are often seen by people as a nuisance, a bother, a drain on the system. Some even say, that when we get old, we revert back to our infancy. The independence we once had, is pretty much gone. Especially in the latter, latter years, seniors often times become utterly dependent on others. They have to be fed, changed, clothed by someone else.

Isn't it ironic that our society has strong and very powerful laws to protect the lives of its citizens during their "useful years," but very weak or no laws at all for its citizens during their "less useful" years. Canada has no laws to protect the unborn and we are going in the direction where we will no longer protect the lives of the dying.

But, Christianity is different. It's so different that most people are outraged when they learn some of the things Christianity believes and does. People say things like, "So you mean to tell me that a good upstanding citizen, who has paid his taxes, served his country, and loved his family, but because he didn't believe in Jesus, he goes to hell; while a person who's lived his entire life as a criminal, yet if he's dying from a gunshot wound, and right before he dies he trusts in Jesus, he goes straight to heaven?" That's scandalous to modern people in our society. That's scandalous even to many Christians." But it's not scandalous to that criminal.

When people hear that going to heaven has nothing to do with how good you are or how much stuff you have on your resume, but that it's a free gift of God, what do they say? They say, "There's gotta be a catch." *Years ago when I was a youth pastor we had a carwash fundraiser. And for some reason we decided to make it a free carwash. Already you're probably thinking, "Yes, pastor, and that's why you should never go into business." You'd probably be right. So we made our signs and kids stood on the sidewalk and 95% of the cars just drove by, but you could see that they were reading the sign. A couple times though, a person would stop and they'd ask, "What's the catch?" And we'd tell them. There's no catch at all. It's a pay what you can, or rather pay what you want, and if you can't pay or don't want to pay, you don't have to. Now, if my memory serves me correctly, at the end of the day, when the totals came in, we didn't make any less than we normally did for the carwashes that had a set price.*

In the same way, because this idea of merit is so engrained into us from the earliest of ages, when we see something that's free, we're immediately suspicious. We look at what Christianity says and we say, "It's too good to be true and we just drive away."

What Christianity says is that God accepts you, not based on your merit, but on the meritorious works of his perfect Son, Jesus Christ. When Jesus Christ went to the cross, he died as an innocent man. He had committed no sins against God. So, Jesus didn't die as a punishment for his own sins and neither did he die the tragic death of mistaken identity—of being at the wrong place and the wrong time, or of just being misunderstood. It was none of those things. He died for a purpose. He died, to take upon himself, the unbridled, full-blown wrath and punishment of God, not for his sins, but for ours.

That's why we don't add anything to our salvation. You don't say to a billionaire, oh, here are a couple pennies, I hope it helps. For crying out loud, we don't even have pennies any more.

You don't say to Mozart, "Let me give you a couple tips on writing timeless music. Uhhh, Wolfgang, You know that obscure piece, "Eine Kleine Nachmusik", you know that one that goes like, 'Da, da da, da da da da da da?' Yeah, that one. It needs more cowbell."

And, certainly we don't say to Jesus, "Hey, great gift, your death, salvation and all that, but you're missing the ribbon. Let me supply you with the ribbon." That's insane. It's foolish to think that we "being good" or doing a few nice things will help. To think that because I let someone merge into my lane—it was Good Friday after all—that God should accept me. We can't add anything, not a single thing, not the tiniest deed, to the completed and finished, meritorious work of Christ.

So, if none of my works count or get credited to my account, if nothing that I do contributes to my salvation, how then do I get right with God, how do I get accepted, how do I get safe passage into heaven? The answer is Justification by Faith. Let me explain what that means. To be justified is to be considered 'not guilty,' not in terms of "you beat the system and got away with murder, or you never got caught." And it doesn't mean that God the judge just turns a blind eye, as if he looks the other way, while waving you into heaven. Justification by Faith is God's way of making guilty sinners (i.e. all of humanity) not only not-guilty, but perfectly righteous, or perfectly obedient, or perfectly good. How does he do that? Don't you want to know how God does that?

When we believe in the historical Easter event, that Jesus died and three days later rose again, and we also believe in the meaning, the purpose of the event—that he died and rose again to pay the penalty for my sin...when we place our trust in that, which means that at the same time, I'm not placing my trust in my works, or my morality, or my good deeds, or my pedigree or anything like that, what happens is this. Here's a very technical theological word. You ready? Here's the word. A **switcheroo** takes place. Every man, woman and child knows what a switcheroo is. A switcheroo is replacing one thing for another thing. The magician shows you an egg one moment, and with a slight of hand, the egg is gone, and there appears a dove instead.

Here's the switcheroo that took place. Our sins were placed on Jesus and his perfect righteousness was placed on us. That's the greatest scandal in all of human history.

Here's how the Apostle Paul says it:

God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. **(2 Corinthians 5:21)**

That's the switcheroo verse. That's why we can, not only be declared not-guilty, but we can also be declared righteous, good, complete, whole, and perfect. Because the sinlessness of the sinless one, was imparted, imputed, transferred to us.

How is that done? By Faith. By believing; not by working, not by trying harder, not by being better, not by turning over a new leaf, or by getting our acts together. No, by faith. By trusting, by throwing yourself upon the Savior. By asking God to save you.

When that happens, when we trust in Jesus, something unthinkable, unbelievable, the stuff of fairy tales, happens to us. We become one with God. We have union with God.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
(Galatians 2:20)

In many ways people of all sorts and types are looking for a union with something or someone outside of themselves. I think it's different from finding purpose. We all want to find purpose in life. We want to know why we are here, at this time, at this place, but union is different. It's sort of mystical. But before you write me off as some quack, let me give you some examples.

Some people look to Eastern religions with Hinduism or Buddhism for some deeper union. We here in the West, have searched long and hard here, and couldn't find what we were looking for, so we go East, perhaps made popular by the Beatles going to India to study Transcendental Meditation in 1968. People go on pilgrimages to the East to learn the secret to Enlightenment.

Or, there are some who go into nature. They go off the grid. They go to learn to live off the land. *There's this documentary that I've watched several times called "Alone in the Wilderness" about a man named Richard Proenneke, that I first saw on TV years ago and then found again on YouTube. Well, he decided one day to leave the civilized world and venture into the wilds of Alaska, build a log cabin and to live off the land.* There was always something really captivating about what he did. I think you realize that you're not the center of the universe, that you are a part of nature, you feel a deep connection with the land. There's a unity with your surroundings. I think we get a small taste of that even when we go tent camping for a few days.

What about in our relationships? When we seek someone with whom to marry, in our most idealistic state, aren't we seeking a special union with another person? It isn't merely pragmatic. It's not just about curing my loneliness or satisfying my sexual desires or creating progeny, or finding someone to help move furniture. I think when we are young and idealistic; we're looking for someone with whom we can be one, to become united. Here too there is a mysterious, or should I say mystical component to this relationship.

What does that reveal about us? I think it reveals that deep inside we weren't really made for ourselves. Our biology, or to be a bit crass, our plumbing tells us that we weren't made for ourselves, we were made for another—a man for a woman and a woman for a man. But beyond the biology, even in our hearts, even in our longings for silly things like "likes" on Facebook. Doesn't that tell us that we crave the attention of others, the acceptance of others, and perhaps that also reveals that deep down inside we are longing to be united with another?

Christianity tells us that this is so. Every person here, you exist so that you can be one, so that you can be united to God. That's what this verse is saying to us. When we trust in Jesus by faith alone, we become one with him, in a mysterious way, for sure; in a mystical way, yes; but in a way that is no less real and true; a way that can be felt and known and experienced. Paul tells, "I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." This is what we all need and this is what we all really want.

Here's what Paul is trying to say, Jesus Christ came to this earth, he lived, he died, and he rose again, so you don't have to live any more, but so that Christ himself can live in you. That means, you can live a life that's not about you, that's not self-absorbed with yourself, that cares so much about what people think about you, that strives so hard to please others, that tries and tries to be something that you were never meant to be. Instead, Christ will live in you. You will be one with Christ and he will start showing you who you really are, what you were put on this earth to do, and how wonderful knowing Christ can be.

Let me share with you how deep the union really is:

¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, (**Colossians 2:12–13**)

Since you died with Christ (**Colossians 2:20**)

you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. (**Colossians 3:1**)

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (**Colossians 3:4**)

Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him, we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him. (**2 Timothy 2:11–12**)

the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. (**John 14:17**)

For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. (**Romans 6:5 NIV11-GK**)

But whoever is united with the Lord is one with him in spirit. (**1 Corinthians 6:17 NIV11-GK**)

He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. (**1 Thesalonians 5:10**)

If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. (**1 John 1:6**)

When we trust in Christ, when we are justified by faith, our union with Christ is so intertwined that Paul can say that we've...

died with him;
We've been **buried** with him;
risen with him;
We **live** with him;
We will **reign** with him;
That we are **one** with him.

Because of that union, we can have the unshakable reassurance that no matter what we are going through, Jesus is with me always to the very end of the age. We can know that he will never leave us, not even for a second. We can possess the power to get through the toughest times. We possess the wisdom to tackle the most challenging problems. We have his friendship so we will never feel alone. And we can know, really know his love, every day, because he showed the full measure of his love when he died and rose again. This is Easter. This is Christianity. This is the Gospel. This is Jesus.

Let's pray.