

Sermon—February 7-8, 1998  
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The Book of Galatians Series  
Galatians 2:15-21

## **How To Be Saved**

I want to begin with a story that is taken from the life of Martin Luther, the Father of the Protestant Reformation and, of course, the man for whom the Lutheran Church is named. On a very hot day in July in the year 1505, a lonely traveler was walking over a dusty road on the outskirts of a German village, Stotternheim. He was a young man. He was short and stout. He was a university student. As he approached the village, the sky became overcast. Suddenly, there was a terrible storm and a shower. And the skies began to thunder. A bolt of lightening broke through the gloom of the day and knocked this university student to the ground. Struggling to rise, to get up on his feet, he cried out in terror, “St. Ann, help me. I will become a monk if you will just keep me from dying.”

The young man who made this vow to become a monk was named Martin Luther, the father of the Protestant Reformation. And he kept his vow. He joined the monastery and tried to do everything within his power to please God. He engaged in long fasts without a crumb. He said fasting was much more consoling to him than feasting because he felt maybe now he was pleasing to God. He loved Lent when he could give things up. He would wake up in the middle of the night to pray. He threw the blankets off his bed and almost froze himself to death at night trying to deny himself some pleasure in order to please God.

At times he was proud of his holiness and he would say to himself, “I did nothing wrong today.” But then these thoughts would bubble to the service, “Have I fasted enough? Do I

really care enough?” And he would strip off all his clothes except what was decent and modest. Luther said, “I was a good monk. I kept all the rules of my order so strictly that I might say if ever a monk were able to get to heaven by monkery, I would have been that monk. If I had kept on any longer I would have killed myself with vigils and prayers and readings and other work.”

The trouble was he just couldn’t satisfy God at any point. As he began reading the Bible he said, “Everything in it is too high for me. Every time I think I am doing well, something comes along and provokes me. I get irritated and angry.” He began to wonder how can a person be saved if someone like me, with all of my striving and all of my fasting and all of my religiousness – I have locked myself up here in a monastery, if someone like me is still falling short, then how can a person be saved?

That is what Paul is dealing with in the section of the Bible that we are going to read today. I have titled today’s talk, “How to be Saved.” Let’s pray.

Let me read to you the text, then, from Galatians 2:15-16, “We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Christ Jesus. We, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

Now Paul is, in ch. 2:15-21, laying out what I might call the general premise or proposition of his letter. He is describing how it is that a person is saved. And he is going to use phrases like “justification by faith”. He is going to oppose that phrase “justification by faith” by another phrase “justified by law.” He is going to talk about being in Christ and he is going to talk about Christ being in us. I am going to break all of this apart in just a moment and explain all the various phrases.

But I want you to note, for present purposes, that Galatians 2:15-21 is his general proposition, his premise. He has been working his way toward this general proposition in the first two chapters by giving some autobiographical material regarding his life and how he got to preach this general proposition. Then the rest of the book is going to be the working out of this general proposition. Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 6 are Paul explicating, explaining, proving and illustrating the proposition that he lays out in Galatians 2:15-21.

I want you to note something else. The apostle Paul uses the phrase “justified” three times in verse 16 and 17. He says, “A man is not justified (you can underline that) by observing 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 then again], because by observing the law no one will be justified. If, while we seek to be justified...”

He is essentially saying the same thing over and over again. In fact Martin Luther said, “Paul is beating the gospel into our brains.” And in his typical earthy fashion, Martin Luther said, “Because we are so stupid that we need to have the same thing told to us over and over again, otherwise we don’t get it.” I would say regarding how it is that we are saved the meaning of our faith and salvation needs to be told to us over and over again.

What does it mean to be justified? Paul uses it three times in vv. 16-17. And then he picks it up again in v. 21, “I do not set aside the grace of Christ, for if righteousness [and it really could be justification, not necessarily righteousness, but justification] could be gain through the law, Christ died for nothing.”

What does justified mean? Certainly, in the 90’s, the only time you hear the word “justified” is something that you do to the right hand column of your word processing. We justify margins. But it is definitely not a word that appears in everyday English so that you could go up to someone and say, “Are you justified, brother?”

Again, because this doctrine of justification by faith is so closely associated with the great Martin Luther, I would mention that Luther called it the “most wonderful doctrine of Christianity.” There is an aspect of justification that is taken right from the legal system, right from the courts. Justification is the opposite of condemnation. When a judge condemns someone they are declaring him guilty. They hand down sentences. We talk of someone being condemned to die. They have been declared guilty and the sentence is death. Justification is the opposite of that. Justification means to be acquitted, to be declared not guilty.

But justification is more than just a judicial verdict of not guilty or acquittal. Justification is also a relational term. It harkens back to the Old Testament, or the old covenant, where to be declared righteous was to be put in a right relationship with God – under the covenant. It is a relational term as well as a judicial term. When God justifies someone, God accepts him or her. He acquits them. But then He puts that person in right relationship to Him.

Now, here is the difficulty that was in the mind of Paul and in the mind of Jews. How could God who is absolutely holy, absolutely clean, ever get Himself into a right relationship with people who are sinners? How could God, being all that God is, reconcile Himself to us being all that we are? There are these two irreconcilable forces heading toward each other on the same track. I picture this enormous train wreck ready to happen. On the one hand, God’s holiness is racing down the track. It is one of those bullet trains. It is traveling at the speed of light and is carrying an infinite amount of force behind it – the holiness of God. Heading right for that train, going in the opposite direction, is our sin carrying an infinite amount of opposition to God. And it looks like there is going to be this cosmic train wreck of incalculable proportions.

Instead, Paul says, somehow God has devised a way to stop the train wreck. So that when a sinner meets God, they are not run over by His holiness, but instead they are completely acquitted, completely pardoned, completely released from condemnation – in a word, saved.

So the question for the apostle Paul is how can we be justified before God? How can we be saved?

Now, before we plunge into Paul's answers I must say that the question that Paul is dealing with, the issue that he is going to be working out, is a very different question and issue than the one Americans are dealing with in the 1990's. In the 1990's, the average man or woman is not walking around wondering, "How can I be justified before holy God?" How can God accept someone like me?" Trust me on this. If you took a random poll of people in the streets, you would not find the preoccupation of men and women on their way to work or in their cars or in their homes, offices or schoolrooms being "How can I be justified before a holy God? How can God accept someone and save someone like me?"

We have actually turned the biblical question on its head. Rather than Paul's question, "How can we be justified before God?" to men and women in the 90's the more pressing issue is "How can God justify Himself and His behavior before us?" It is not "How can God accept us?" It is "How can we accept Him?" We may have real questions about God allowing suffering or premature death or abuse. In fact, if that is an issue for you, if you really struggle with how do you reconcile the notion of a good and powerful God to all of the suffering that you may have suffered, or all of the suffering that you see around you, I did a tape on that particular topic in a series I called, "Tough Questions the Critics Ask" last spring. So I did a whole message on why bad things happen to good people. And you may want to pick that up. I haven't the time to get into a lengthy answer to that question.

But I am just noting for present purposes that in the modern world, unlike the Biblical world, we really conceive of ourselves as the Judge and as the Prosecutor. And God is the defendant on the witness stand. Here we are demanding some reason from God regarding why we should accept Him. Justify Yourself to us is the attitude of men and women in the 90's. Otherwise, if You do not justify Yourself to us, we will not accept You and we will declare You irrelevant, someone not worth paying attention to, someone not worthy of our time.

To understand and appreciate the wonder of justification from the perspective of the apostle Paul, we must deal with our understanding of guilt and sin. See, the wonder of being saved, of being justified, that is pardoned, acquitted, put in right relationship with God is rooted in an understanding of the fact that we are guilty before God and we are guilty before God because we are sinners. Now, this is not a common understanding of the man in the street, the woman in her car. Just as we demand God to justify Himself to us rather than us begin justified to God, so we have very little appreciation of the Biblical perspective that we are guilty or sinners. You can't appreciate being saved when you are not really in touch of anything you need to be saved from. It is one thing to have radically metastasizing cancer and be terminal. In that case, you might search for the world's best doctor and have him heal you of that cancer. It is quite another thing to have a little cold; you might not even seek out a doctor for your cold. Justification is only appreciated if we realize that our starting place with God is not generally OK, except that you have the sniffles. The starting place with God is that we have moral malignant cancer. We go to the Great Physician, our Savior, because we have a death sentence over our lives. We are not basically OK.

Now there is a very limited consciousness of sin or guilt in America. I read a story of one pastor who had a conversation with a newcomer to his church who was checking the

church out. They had been attending for a while and came in and talked with the pastor. He said, "Pastor, I really like the church. I like a lot of what you are doing, but I will tell you that you talk too much about sin and the fact that we are sinners. I think that is unhealthy and bad because it makes people feel bad and I really don't think that we are really sinners. At least I don't think that I am."

The pastor said to him, "Well, tell me, what kind of job do you have?"

The man said, "I am a traveling salesman."

The pastor asked, "How long have you been on the road?"

The man said, "About 20 years."

The pastor said, "I don't mean to get personal, but in the 20 years that you have been out on the road away from your family a few nights a week, was there ever a time when a good-looking gal caught your eye in a bar and you couldn't really help yourself? You went back to your room with her?"

The man smiled and said, "Well, you know...these kinds of things happen. I am a man."

The pastor said, "In all the 20 years that you have been on the road, was there ever a time when you padded your expense account, got a little more money than you really should have based on your time?"

The man said, "Yeah. I am sure that has happened quite often. Everybody pads a little."

The pastor said, "When you are dealing with clients, did you ever at any time exaggerate what your company could offer or shade the truth a little about what your competitors were like and the service that they give?"

The man said, "Well, sure, I am a salesman. Talk is my trade."

The pastor said, “So what you just told me then is that you are an adulterer, a thief, and a liar. And yet you come in here today trying to tell me that you aren’t a sinner?”

See, the way that we approach sin in America is, “Well, I admit that I have some failings. Everyone has some failings. Afterall, though, no one is perfect.” But the magnitude of our sinfulness, the ugliness of our true selves is really minimized. It is laughed at. It is rationalized. It is joked about. Look at the public’s response to President Clinton’s alleged affair with Monica Lewinsky. Many people assume that the President of the United States has been unfaithful and lied about it. And yet, even starting with the premise that yes he has been unfaithful with this woman, there is a shrug of the shoulders and the perspective that well, you know, everyone does it. It has no relationship to his job performance. His character is really not an issue for the President. Lead articles in which Europeans are quoted, “Oh, you Americans are so prudish. We have never judged our politicians based on their sexuality.” So long as the economy works, that is all I care about.

We have lost an appreciation of guilt. And we have lost an appreciation of sin. And because these two concepts are so weakened in the American mind, we have lost any ability to really appreciate being justified and being saved. We are often told by modern therapy that guilt feelings are bad. It is like poison in your being. Guilt feelings need to be quickly washed away. We have developed a capacity in the 90’s to just immediately move past terrible things we do to each other. “Well, I realize that was a mistake, but I have to move on with my life,” is the philosophy. What is done is done. I can’t look back. If I can’t fix it, there is no sense in feeling guilty about it.

Maybe some of you hold that philosophy. Guilt feelings are terrible, you think. We even say food now, and vacation trips are guilt-free because guilt is so bad. We have guilt free double dutch chocolate low-cal cookies. Guilt free sex and guilt free cruises.



I want to ask you this question. Are you feeling guilt? Are guilty feelings the kinds of things we really want to eliminate? Has guilt received a bad rap in the US?

I want to tell you today; in fact I want to give you permission to feel guilty whenever you are guilty. If you have really done wrong to your child, to a spouse, to God, if you really have done wrong, then it is appropriate to feel bad. In fact, it shows that you are morally alive when you have bad feelings following bad actions. You are morally dull or dead when you have no bad feelings following bad actions. If you can have guilt free sex with an anonymous stranger or guilt free adultery or if you can lie without guilt or you are able to take something that doesn't belong to you without guilt, or you are able to cheat on an exam, or copy someone else's work and put your name on it, or lie on a resume – if you are able to be immoral, without the moral feelings of guilt, then in that area of your life, you have become morally dead, insensitive, hard, callous.

I want to give you permission, as a pastor, to feel bad when you do bad things. Or to feel bad when you neglect to do well. Guilt is like the little oil lamp on the dashboard of your car. Maybe you have heard this before, but if your conscience is properly functioning, then the little guilt light goes on when something is wrong. Just like when your oil light goes on, you should immediately pull into a gas station and stop driving otherwise you will destroy your engine. When your guilt light goes on, you need to pause, reflect and stop doing what you are doing or start doing what you are currently not doing, or you will destroy yourself morally.

Now it is the case that occasionally we come across someone who has an overly sensitive oil light. The person whose oil light is broken and it goes on even when there is oil in the engine. That needs to be repaired; otherwise it doesn't give you a true reading of what is going on in your engine. It is also the case that we occasionally come across someone who

has an overly sensitive conscience. That is what the Bible calls a weak conscience. They feel bad and guilty about what is not wrong. The person who lives with the constant pressure of oughts and shoulds that are not coming from holy God, but from this oil light that never shuts off. You meet people like that, unfortunately. Sometimes they have been raised in religious homes where grace was not emphasized. Where there was no forgiveness, no mercy. And I hate to name names, but sometimes in fundamentalistic homes that are characterized by lots of rules and in some traditional Roman Catholic families, children grow up with an overly sensitive conscience.

But, I want to tell you that the problem in America now is not that 9 out of 10 people are walking around filled with guilt over things they ought not feel guilty about. I know that is the popular view, but the problem in America right now is that 9 out of 10 people don't feel guilt about things they should feel guilt about. We are not dealing in America, primarily, or in the church, with guilt filled people who have been raised with way too many rules and need to be free. We are dealing with people who have been permissibly raised and feel no guilt about the things they ought to feel guilt over. There is a moral dullness, hardness, and coarseness in our national life.

How can we gain an appreciation, an awakening regarding these issues of guilt and sin, so that we can awaken to the wonder of justification, salvation, the favor of God, his extraordinary mercy in wanting to relate to us? Well, certainly, we must pray for revival. If you are a Christian, I would encourage you to regularly pray for revival to break out in this church and revival to break out in this city and across this country. Because apart from real revival, real Holy Spirit intrusion into the life of this church, our city and this nation, we will be dull.

And certainly we must gain an appreciation for what the Bible actually says about sin. Sin is not just the way it is portrayed in advertisements—a little naughty, something that is kind of desirable. I mean this chocolate cake is sinfully delicious. The seats in the Peugeot we are driving in are sinfully soft. Sin is almost always portrayed as kind of nice, kind of fun – and you are kind of stupid to stay away from it.

Well, let me give you a different picture of sin and rather than being delicious, kind of naughty, but rather wonderful, sin is described in the Bible with lots of different metaphors. One of the metaphors for sin in the Bible is stench. It is like what you would get from a dead corpse. The great poet e. e. Cummings described sin in a person as being like leaky plumbing where the stench of what runs through the plumbing fills the house. You walk into the house and you say, “Oh my...” That is the picture of sin.

I remember working with my dad when he had some work in an inner city apartment building one time. The door to one of these apartments opened up as I was walking through the hallway. And I was about to walk into the apartment. What hit me was the stench of a diaper pail filled with dirty diapers. The apartment reeked. I am very sensitive to smells and as I turned and put my hand over my mouth, all over the wall there were roaches. I had to run out of that place so that I didn’t throw up.

That is a picture of sin. Because the Bible said that God literally in response to our sin wants to vomit. It is not sinfully delicious. It is sinfully revolting. Sin is described as rottenness, like rotting food. I don’t know if you have ever gone into the back of your refrigerator to clean out of your refrigerator, and you found some container buried way in the back behind the 4-year old jar of mustard and jelly that someone gave you a couple of Christmases ago, there is a little plastic container back there that you didn’t notice for a while. You wondered where it had gone. You open it and there is pork chop in it covered

with blue fuzz. Sinfully delicious? Alluring? Kind of naughty, but let's eat it? Sin in the Bible is described as rottenness.

Sin in the Bible is described in personal terms as spiritual adultery. Sin is not some departure from an abstract rule. Hey, I just broke the rules, what's the big deal? It is personal unfaithfulness. It is infidelity. God reacts with the same kind of hurt and horror that a victimized husband or wife reacts to the discovery of their spouse's adultery. You have watched people who have discovered their spouse's adultery. It catches them in the gut. It hurts so bad. They obsess over it, especially when they love their spouses and they feel so violated. It is so painful.

One of the most wonderful signs of life is when a person who has justified their sin, rationalized it all the way, made up excuses why a particular behavior is okay for them in this particular case, suddenly awakens from that moral dullness and they feel the crushing wave of guilt. For the first time they are alive. They have come out of the stupor, the dream world. You see that in the story of the lost son. Jesus tells the story of a boy who ran away from his father and ended up in a pigsty. One day he woke up, he came to his senses. I love when I watch that process happen in a person's life. The bell goes off. They suddenly see the oil light on the dashboard. We don't stay in that state. We must do something with that guilt. We have to run to God for our salvation, for healing. But friends, we have to recover a sense of guilt and sin.

Let me ask you a question. Is your conscience properly functioning in all areas? Is the warning light on your dashboard on about some area of your life; something you shouldn't be doing; something you need to do? Are you responding? Well Paul in Galatians 2:15 says, "We who are Jews from birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Christ. So, we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus so that

we may be justified in Christ and not by observing the law because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

Paul is laying out two great alternatives. One that will not lead to salvation or justification and the other that will. He begins by saying this is how not to be saved, to be justified by law. And according to the Jews in Paul’s day, the way that a person was brought into right relationship with God and received God’s judicial verdict of acquittal was by keeping the Old Testament laws. It was by sheer hard work. Doing everything that the law required you to do and refraining from doing everything that the law forbid you from doing. So you had to, of course, keep the Ten Commandments. But, in addition, you had to keep the Jewish ritual law of circumcision and food cleanliness. And then, the ultra Orthodox would then require you to keep their rules, not necessarily rules listed in the Bible, but what Jesus called the traditions of men or the Oral Traditions.

So on top of the 613 laws in the Torah, the Five Books of Moses, the Rabbi Elilzar, specified how often a common laborer or donkey driver, camel driver or tailor should have sex with their wives. They added dozens and dozens of rules about the Sabbath. A man could ride on a donkey on the Sabbath without breaking the Sabbath rules, but if he carried a switch to speed up the animal, he would be guilty of laying a burden on it. A woman could not look into a mirror on the Sabbath because if she saw a gray hair she would be tempted to pluck it out and that would be work. You could swallow vinegar, but you couldn’t gargle with it. And so there was not only the law, but also all of these other regulations that people had to obey.

And Paul says that none of that will make you right with God. Again, we have to culturally fit this text into our culture and acknowledge that most Americans are not working

like crazy to earn God's favor. The average American is not like Martin Luther spending their days and nights in fasting and prayer begging God to accept them.

Justification by works of the law is the religion of the average man or woman in the streets. When a person believes that based on what they do they are OK people with God, that based on what they produce I guess that will have to be enough for God, they are thinking that they are justified by works of the law which is precisely what Paul says will never get you saved. So when a person says, "Well, I guess God is just going to weigh out my good and bad deeds and the good will probably outweigh the bad, the scale will be tipped and that is how I will be saved," they are thinking they will be justified by the works of the law, just like the ancient Jews in Paul's day did.

Justification by works of the law is the religion that is preached at most funerals. When someone stands up and eulogizes mom and says, "Mom was such a good woman I know that because of her great love for her family. She is in heaven now." They are saying Mom has somehow justified herself before God based on *her* jump, *her* trying, *her* good works, and *her* leap across the Canyon. It is the religion that I heard mentioned by a Catholic Priest as he commented on the death of Mother Teresa. He said, "If anyone has ever deserved heaven, it is Mother Teresa." The Canyon is not, at least, impossibly wide. Mother Teresa was able to leap it.

Justification by works of the law is the religion of historic America. "Pull yourself up by your own bootstraps." John Stott, the great English Bible scholar, says, "Justification by works or the law is self-justification by our own trying is the biggest lie by the biggest liar. It comes right from the pit of hell, from Satan the father of lies." The reason it is a big lie is because no one can meet all of God's demands. No one can keep his or her heart and mind perfectly pure, as God wants it.

The way we break up the human race is that we break it up into two categories of people. Good people, who deserve heaven and bad people who deserve hell. But you know the way the Bible breaks up people is totally different. It says there are two categories of people, but those two categories are sinners, who deny that they are sinners and try to work their way to God and as a result end up in hell, and sinners who admit they are sinners and throw themselves on God's mercy and God's way of salvation and so end up in heaven.

What is God's way of salvation? Paul calls it justification by faith. In v. 16 he says, "Know that a man is not justified by observing 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." The way to get in a right relationship with God and have God declare over your life pardoned, acquitted, not guilty, you are in right relationship with me, is faith. We are justified by faith.

What kind of faith saves a person? Lots of people talk about faith. Keep the faith, brother. You just must have faith. You just must believe. What sort of faith justifies? Paul is very specific here. Three times in v. 16 he says the only kind of faith that brings you into right relationship with God is faith in Jesus. Knowing that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. What kind of faith is it that saves? So, we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that saves. Then he goes on because we don't get it to say a third time that we may be justified by faith in Christ. What sort of faith saves? Faith in Christ. And if you still don't get it, Paul repeats himself in v. 20 when he says, "the life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, in Christ."

Of all the things that we could be relying on, trusting in, resting upon to make us right with God, the Bible says you have to put your faith in Christ. Don't put your faith in the fact that you were raised in a Christian family or in a Christian home. That won't save you. Don't put your faith in the fact that you were baptized when you were a baby. That won't

save you. Don't put your faith in the fact that you attend church. That won't save you. Don't even put your faith in your faith. Justification is not based upon faith. It is not because of our faith, it is because of what our faith is in — Jesus. See, faith is nothing but the instrument through which we rely on Jesus.

Faith is the channel, the pipe, through which God's righteousness comes to us. It is not faith that saves us. What saves us is Jesus. It is the death of Jesus on the cross that saves us. It is His perfect life that saves us. It is Jesus appearing before the Father and praying for us that saves us. It is God putting Christ's righteousness in our account that saves us. Faith is the way that Christ's righteousness becomes mine. Faith is the way that all that Christ has earned becomes mine. Christ earned salvation and by faith I receive what he earned. It is not faith that earns it for me; otherwise I would be making faith into a work. It is Christ who earns it by his life and death. And it becomes mine by me trusting in him, resting on him, relying on him.

When someone says, "Oh, Rich, I wish I had your faith" they are thinking that it is the faith that saves you. It is Christ that saves and I rely on him.

Now there is one great objection to this notion of the way that I have a right relationship with God is simply by faith, not by trying, not by religion, not by obeying the laws, not by fasting, not by getting baptized, not by going to church, not by being a good person—there is one great objection. It is laid out in vv. 17-20, "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!" Remember he was writing to people who were thinking from a Jewish framework. They were saying, "Paul, if we follow your argument, then a person can become right with God totally apart from obeying all the rules in the Torah and all the Jewish ritual laws and getting circumcised and eating the right food and obeying all the man-made laws.



If it is just trusting in Christ that gets you into a right relationship with God, putting your faith in Christ, then what is the incentive to do right? In a certain sense, why bother trying at all to do the right thing. I am trusting in Christ; I can do whatever the heck I want. Does Christ promote sin? Does living a life that is not law-centered get a person more involved in sin? If you just start preaching, Paul, that simple trust in Jesus Christ nails your salvation forever, wow, people are going to do whatever they want to do then. They are going to misuse that idea all over the place. If people get off the performance treadmill, they'll probably stop trying altogether.

I love what one English preacher, Martin Lloyd-Jones, said about the doctrine of justification by faith only. He said, "There is clearly a sense in which the message of justification by faith only can be dangerous. Likewise, that the message that salvation is entirely by grace is dangerous. But I would say to all preachers that if your preaching of salvation has not been misunderstood in that way, then you had better examine your sermons again, and you better make sure you are really preaching the salvation offered in the New Testament to the ungodly, to the sinner, to the enemies of God, there is a kind of dangerous element about the true presentation of the doctrine of salvation."

Grace is always likely to be misunderstood. But it is important to work out Paul's argument here, in finishing this, and say to you that justification, being in a right relationship with God and declared acquitted and not guilty before the eternal judge is not just a change in our legal status. Justification results in a change not only in our legal standing before God but also in a change in us.

Note Paul's language in v. 17. He says, "If while we seek to be justified in Christ..." our change of status occurs in Christ. By faith you are placed in Christ or into Christ. A person who is justified is a person who has been united to Christ, joined to Christ, brought into an

intimate connection to Christ, the closest possible relationship. At one point, Paul in trying to express this union with Christ uses the marriage illustration.

He says, “Just like a husband and wife are one, so Christians are one in Spirit with the Lord.” This idea of being in Christ is used 164 times in Paul’s letters. 164 times Paul says that the way that we are saved is we are put in Christ by faith. We are intimately connected with him. We are joined to him. We are united with him. The Christian life is that the Christian is put into Christ. The Christian life is also Christ is put into us.

V. 20, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” There is this radical change, not just a legal verdict. The Christian life is, “I am in Jesus and Jesus is in me.” Not only has my legal standing changed, I have changed. I am not the same person. I am new.

Now, there is a massive misunderstanding in many Christian circles about this whole issue of being justified by faith and whether a person justified by faith really changes or it is just their legal standing that changes. In many Christian circles they say, “Well, you know we certainly urge a person who has accepted Christ and is, therefore, justified to grow and to change, but we admit that it is theoretically possible for a person to accept Christ and really be saved and yet continue to live the same way they did before they accepted Christ for 60 years and then die.”

Many Christians would say, “Well, we certainly tell people that they are living inconsistently with their faith if they aren’t changing.” We tell people that they are being hypocritical if they are not changing. But, yes, I have to admit that it is theoretically possible and unfortunately our church sees it all the time when a person is justified by faith and yet shows no sign of any change whatsoever in behavior or attitude until they die.

The apostle Paul would say and the New Testament writers would say, “I don’t know what religion you are talking about when you say it is possible for a person to be justified by faith and not change at all, but it is certainly not the Christianity that I preach.” The Christianity that I preach, Paul would say, teaches people that faith places people into Christ and Christ is placed into them by the Holy Spirit. Paul would go on to say, “Friends, you can not but be changed when you are joined to Christ.” Paul would not simply say and he is not going to argue “you should change”, “I want you to change”, “ you ought to change”, “it is a good idea to change”, “it would be inconsistent with your profession of faith if you didn’t change”. Paul is arguing here, and in the rest of the book of Galatians, it is impossible [not just unthinkable] it is impossible for you not to change if you are joined in faith union to Christ, the kind of union that brings about justification.

In fact, to describe the radical nature of the change that happens to a saved person, Paul speaks of it in terms of death and resurrection. In v. 19 he says, “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” In other words, the Christian is no longer living a law-centered existence in which the Old Testament rules over them, dominates their thinking, they’re trying to be accepted through obeying the laws of God. No. The Christian lives a Christ-centered existence. The concern is about imitating Christ and following Christ and meditating on Christ and being intimate with Christ. We are set free from the law so that we can live for God.

But the Christian also goes through a major change not only with respect to the law, but also even with respect to themselves. In v. 20 the apostle Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loves me and gave himself for me.”

What does all of that mean? What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? When a person puts their faith in Jesus to save them, the person is not only delivered from the rule and domination of the law, but also is delivered from the rule and domination of the self. Paul says, "I no longer live." He means my ego no longer rules. My needs, my wants, my desires, my lusts no longer rule my life as a Christian. The Christian life is a Christ-ruled life. I am joined in union with Christ and so that as Christ died on the cross, my ruling of my life dies with him.

I often, in explaining the way to be saved to a person, say, "Friend, here is what it means to put your faith in Christ. You are trusting that his death for your sins is enough. And you are also giving up the rule of your life." I often say to people, "It is as if you are sliding over from the driver's seat of your life to the passenger's seat and you are saying, 'Jesus Christ, you drive the car.'" It is as if you take out a blank check and sign it and you are saying, "Jesus Christ, for the rest of my life, you get to fill in the amount, whatever you want. Whatever you ask of me." And I get real specific with people and I say, "Do you understand that becoming a Christian is inviting the Christ-ruled life? You are saying to Christ, 'Christ, you get to call the shots on my sex life. I no longer will call the shots. Christ, you get to call the shots on how I spend my money and how much I give. I no longer call the shots. Christ, you get to call the shots on my career and what I am going to do with my future. I no longer call the shots. Christ, you get to determine whether you want to send me to be a missionary in some far off place. I no longer call the shots.'"

When a person places their faith in Christ for real salvation, at that moment and on that day, that person dies in terms of ruling their life. So I would say on March 28, 1974 I died. By my faith union with Christ I was placed into Christ and Christ came into me by the Holy Spirit and I entered a right relationship with God. I was justified. Declared eternally in the

right with God. The verdict was pronounced on my life. I died. And now the rest of the time I live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Tell me on what date did you die? I don't even ask you now the shallower question, have you accepted Christ? Many folks have prayed some prayer, but they are not convinced they are in faith union with Christ, at least not the way Paul is describing it, because they very much rule and are in control. When did you die? Can you say December 4, 1981 I gave up the rule to Christ? Or how about today – February 7, 1998, I died that the life of Christ would be in me changing me.

This, friends, is how to be saved. We gain a consciousness of our sin, an appreciation of the gift of guilt that puts us in touch with our sin. We recognize the hopelessness of ever working our way to God because the Canyon is too broad and we don't try to narrow the Canyon, or make it easier than it is meant to be. We say, "Oh, God, thank you that by relying on Christ and trusting in him you give me salvation as a gift. But the salvation that comes to me as a gift occurs through my being united with Christ and Christ coming into my life and all that changes me. That change can only be described like death and resurrection, a freedom not only from striving to perform, but a freedom from living under my control and running my head into the wall by my bad leadership. So I come in to the liberating, exhilarating sense of being led by Jesus Christ."

Do you know this wonderful change in your life? Can you say this day "I know that I am saved?"

Let's pray.