

Study 4
Galatians 2:15-21

1. The human tendency is to try to justify ourselves whilst the gospel tells us that it is God who justifies us. What does justification mean?

The fundamental human problem since the fall in Genesis 3 is sin causing alienation from God and mankind subject to eternal damnation and separation from God. We because of our rebellion are not rightly related to God which means we are not living as what we were designed and obligated to be hence we are not righteous in the eyes of God. Justification means being declared righteous by God. It means that our fundamental position of being not rightly related to God has been reversed. It means our legal position has changed and instead of being wrongly related we are now restored to a right relationship with Him. Using a common understanding it is a legal term signifying that God, as the judge, has removed our guilt and credited us with Christ's righteousness. This is not based on what we did or are going to do but entirely through faith in Jesus Christ, who fulfilled the law on our behalf.

2. The common criticism of the gospel is that it is too easy as the sinner does not have to achieve anything he just has to have faith in Jesus so this will lead to a lax immoral life and a license to sin even more. How does Paul refute this?

Paul refutes this by emphasizing that true faith unites us with Christ in His death and resurrection. Faith in Christ has several implications. Firstly it means that we realise and regret that we have sinned and rebelled against God and are deserving of eternal punishment. Secondly, we realize that God sent his Son to take our punishment on the cross to bring us back in a right relationship with Him. Thirdly faith in Christ means we believe in the first two facts and turn away from our self centered existence and decided to live for Him and accept His sacrifice for us. This is what it means when we say we are crucified with Christ, our old sinful nature is put to death, and we are made alive in Him. It is marks a new direction in life and the metaphor of crucified with Christ is merely a dramatic way of saying that we are done with our past life. We have rejected and appalled by our previous life which was characterized by sin. We don't want to live like this and we want to live in a new way and this new life is not marked by sin but by living for God. Hence if true faith is characterized by these three elements then it would be logically impossible for the person to use justification as a license to sin because the entire framework of faith in Christ is based on the rejection of sin. It is a fundamental 180 deg change in direction of the way we live. People who regard justification as a license to sin misunderstand this fundamental issue. It is like telling who was driving to Singapore to become a Singaporean to turns around and drives to Penang to become a Penangite and if he does that his debt of RM 1000 will be settled. He says he will accept the deal but he keeps driving towards Singapore. It is totally illogical. Justification means a

fundamental change in direction of life hence it cannot not lead to a life with a license to sin but to transformation. If the person's direction in life and propensity to sin does not change it means that his conversion was never authentic in the first place.

3. What does Paul mean by "through the Law, I died to the law" Gal 2:19?

Paul means that the law's demands and penalties were fully satisfied in Christ's death. As Keller often says, Jesus lived the life we should have lived and died the death we should have died. God did not just wave his magic wand and make the sin and penalty all disappear but God lives by His own eternal rules and the demands and penalties of the law were fully satisfied by His own Son. By faith, Paul is united to Christ's death, so he is no longer under the law's condemnation or obligation to earn righteousness through it. Instead, he is free to live for God.

4. What was the purpose of us dying to the Law?

The purpose of dying to the law is to be freed from its requirements and penalties over us as we can never fully fulfill these. So in a sense the Law has power and condemnation over us because we are sinners and cannot fulfill these. In Christ these requirements and penalties were fully satisfied hence they no longer hang over us like the proverbial sword of Damocles. Once free from these we are finally truly free to live as we were created to be in the image of God so that we might live for God. Our salvation is not about rule-keeping but about a restored relationship with God through faith in Christ.

5. In what way have we been crucified with Christ?

Being crucified with Christ means that our old self—our sinful nature and reliance on works for righteousness—has been put to death with Him on the cross. We now live a new life through Christ, who lives in us. This union with Christ is the foundation of our Christian life.

6. What is the whole purpose of justification by faith?

The purpose of justification by faith is to save us and glorify God by showing that salvation is His work alone. It ensures that no one can boast in their own efforts and that all believers, regardless of background, are united as one in Christ.

7. How does living by works affect how we feel about ourselves on a day-to-day basis? How does it affect the way we feel about others?

Living by works often leads to either pride or despair—pride when we think we're succeeding and despair when we fail. It also fosters judgmentalism and comparison with others, as we measure their worth against our own efforts.

8. How does living by works cause alienation and barriers between Jews and Gentiles, people of different races or cultures or countries

Living by works creates barriers each person or each culture place different criteria as the basis of merit or glory. The OT word for glory is "kavod" which means weight. We were made to reflect God's glory or weight but in sin we rejected this and decided to reflect our own glory for which we are eternally deficient and we know it. We create our own standards for glory just like the nations of the world decided to us gold as the standard of value and trade and assign value based on the weight of the gold they own. The weight of gold becomes the distinguishing factor between nations and between individuals as the rich man is regarded better than the poor man. In different cultures we give weight or glory to different things. The caste system in India. The Greeks valued philosophy and wisdom. The basis of all these differences is human effort or achievement. The Jews valued the Law and its adherence even though they were hypocritical about it but all these fosters division based on who follows which rules or traditions. In Paul's context, this manifested in Jewish believers separating from Gentiles over food laws and circumcision. As long as human effort in determining glory and assigning value exist there will be divisions as they will ultimately clash as they are all focused inwards towards themselves and not at one source God. Hence the chaos and strife in the world as we each become our own gods. Salvation by faith strikes at the core of this dysfunction when we realise that we each are responsible for the pain of the world and only He can save us. The unity this brings is based on every one instead of turning inwards all turn to face Christ ward in one direction. We forsake valuing or own efforts at glory and focus on His glory to reflect Him rather than us.

9. How do we in practical terms live by faith in Jesus? What is our motivating factor for doing so?

Living by faith in Jesus means daily trusting in His finished work rather than our own efforts. Practically, this involves reading Scripture, prayer, and relying on the Holy Spirit for strength and guidance. Our motivation is gratitude for God's grace and love for Christ, who gave Himself for us.

Takeaway

Justification comes through faith in Christ alone, not by works of the law. When we are crucified with Christ, we die to self-reliance and live in the freedom of His grace, empowered by His Spirit.