

Gal. 2:15-16; Rom. 3:21-26; Justified by Faith I. Man's Works Cannot Save II. God's Gift Does Save

Congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, how do you view laws? For example, if you are driving down the interstate, do you view the speed limit law as a blessing or a curse? Does the law hinder you from doing what you want? If you obey the laws of man, we expect the enforces of the law to leave us alone- right? The police do not pull over those who obey the speed limit. Well, as we return to Gal. 2 this evening we are going to see that the way in which we relate to man's laws is not the same way we relate to the laws of God. Although it is possible to obey the laws of men, it remains impossible to keep God's law perfectly. In Gal. 2, Paul is continuing to build his argument. He is going to destroy the false teaching of these Judaizers by showing the inadequacy of the Law. He is going to answer this question- how can we be made right with God? Paul is going to define and explain justification. This foundational teaching not only was needed in Paul's day- it was the same issue that sparked the reformation. Justification has been called the doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. If we get this teaching wrong- we will have no basis for hope in the life to come. So we consider this theme: the Father justifies sinners who trust in His Son.

I. Man's Works Cannot Save

In our first point, we consider the inability of man's works to save. The good news of the gospel is, first of all, that salvation is not a work of hands nor merited by our actions. Paul starts v. 15 by pointing to his own heritage. If Paul, being a Jew by birth, cannot earn his salvation by works, how much less a Gentile sinner! If the best of humanity cannot earn their deliverance- if the covenant people of Israel cannot purchase their own salvation- what hope does the rest of humanity have? Remember that Paul was a Hebrew of Hebrews- from the tribe of Benjamin- a zealot- a Pharisee among Pharisees- trained at the feet of Gamaliel. If he could not earn his own deliverance, no one can! If the Jewish people- the direct descendants of Abraham- the one to whom God had revealed Himself- the people who had in fact received the Law- if they cannot be justified by their works- what does that say about the ignorant, sinful Gentiles? When it comes to justification by the works of man, both Jew and Gentile have a common lot! No one is righteous as Paul would say in Rom. 3!

None seek after God- none can earn grace from God based on their works. So both Jew and Gentile have a common footing- you cannot be justified by the works of your hand. So it is clear- that ancestry and action do not save! Being a child of Abraham by the flesh does not mean that you are any better off in regards to righteousness. Now what are these works of the Law that Paul is speaking about? Well, the works of the Law are the works that are rooted in the flesh- external requirements. These works of the law that Paul refers to are the works required in the books of Moses. The Works of the Law is a shorthand way of referring to the entire Mosaic Law in the first 5 books of the OT. As we will see later on, the Law is not bad in itself, but it is limited. The Law is to be used properly- but the improper use of the Law is trying to use the Law as a means of self-justification. So the Law refers to the ceremonial sacrifices and the rituals of the OT. For example, the Mosaic Law commanded that baby boys must be circumcised. This Law also forbids the eating of unclean foods and demands ceremonial washings. These works of the law were only shadows and could not save. If you were to keep all of them- you still would not be right with God if that is all you did. Yet even in reference to the moral Law as summarized in the 10 Commandments we find the Law's limits. Obedience to these rules would not make a person justified in the presence of God. Even if you could perfectly keep the commandments by loving God first and loving your neighbor as yourself, you could not by this obedience secure justification for yourself. But why not? Why is it impossible for Jews and Gentiles to secure their own justification by their works? Well, there are 2 main reasons why the Law cannot justify. First of all, the Law was never meant to justify. Using the Law to secure justification is an improper use of the Law. Put another way, the Law is not the mechanism that God has given us by which we can be justified. How do we know this? Well, consider that Abraham was justified before the Law was even given! Abraham was justified long before Moses was even born! Abraham was justified before he received the command to circumcise as well. So there must be some other mechanism that God has given by which we can be justified- as we will see in our second point. And the second reason why the Law is not able to justify is because of man's inability and sin. Even if you could somehow perfectly keep all of the

commandments of God- perfectly obeying the 10 Commandments from your youth- what is obedience but giving God what He deserves? You still would not earn justification because your actions have no way of dealing with your sinful nature! In other words, obedience to the Law does not secure forgiveness! So to summarize, the reason why the Law cannot justify is because of an inability in man and an inability in the Law. V. 16 then slams the door shut- by works of the law no one will be justified. No one- no man- no Jew and no Gentile. It is impossible for the Law to justify you- it cannot and will not happen! There is a universal application to this truth. Not a single sinner has or ever will be justified by their own works! No ceremonial works or moral actions can do what we need- which is to be made right with God. The Judaizers needed to hear this- the Galatian Christians needed to be reminded of this truth. And to apply it today- if you are trying to earn God's mercy by what you do- it will not work! Man's flesh cannot save! Our works cannot earn or gain what is necessary! No amount of prayers, tears, church attendance, sacrificial giving, or other work of your hand can give you peace with God!

II. God's Gift Does Save

So then - is all hope lost? Since my works cannot save- since the Law cannot justify- what hope do we have? Where can we find good news? If not by our works of the Law- how can we be justified? Again we read in v. 16- we are justified through faith in Jesus Christ. What is justification? Well justification is a work of God whereby the guilty are declared innocent and righteous. We are dealing with righteousness- our standing before God. How does God see us? In this framework, the Father as judge declares us acceptable- even welcomed in His presence. This is done on the basis of works. Let me say this again- justification is on the basis of works- just not OUR works! We are declared righteous based on the works and merit of Jesus Christ! Jesus, being the perfect God-man, has the ability to secure righteousness for those who cannot in themselves. This process of transferring righteousness is called double imputation. Our sins are credited to Jesus and His perfect righteousness is credited to our account. So we are justified because of the works of Jesus Christ. But how does this process take place? What is the means and mechanism by which Christ's righteousness becomes ours? Here again we find in v. 16- through faith in Christ- for those who

have believed in Christ- and again- to be justified by faith in Christ. So the contrast comes to light- not by works of merit and man- but by faith in the works of Jesus. That is how we are right with God! Faith is then contrasted with works- God's mercy with the Law's obedience. Faith in Jesus is a trusting in His works- it is believing what the Bible says about Him- a reliance on His office and sacrifice. To put this another way- we are right with God because we trust in His Son. Having received a nature that was free from sin by the Spirit and living a life of perfect obedience enabled Jesus to secure for us what we could not earn for ourselves. So true, justifying faith is a dependence on Jesus' works and not our own. Now this is good news- because of our sin and our sinful nature we will always remain stained and polluted in this life. God demands perfection and absolute holiness as a grounds of righteousness! Being unable to supply this by ourselves- God in His grace sent Jesus to secure the justification that we need! Let me illustrate this- imagine that you are in a sinking ship in the middle of the sea. Your rescue will not be found in trusting in a fellow man who is on his own sinking ship. Rather, the only true rescue is found in the form of a dramatic transfer! Someone takes you from your sinking ship and places you on the firm, dry ground! In this way, Jesus rescues sinners from destruction and places their feet on dry ground- safe and secure! The need for rescue is universal- as 3:8 puts it- both Jew and Gentiles are justified by faith. And again in 3:11- the righteous shall live by faith. So a faith righteousness is the opposite of a works righteousness. As Paul also wrote in Rom. 3:22- the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law. The righteousness of God through faith in Christ Jesus for all who believe.

As we close, understanding how we can be justified is the central point of the Christian faith. The doctrine upon which the church stands or falls. Salvation is a free gift of God- justification is a work of God- justified through faith in Jesus Christ. To be saved we are to accept this gift with a believing heart- trusting in the God-appointed means of salvation. As our theme states: the Father justifies sinners who trust in His Son. Praise God for supplying the necessary means by which we can be justified! Thy grace alone can save a guilty soul.