

Paul: The Spiritual Abolitionist, Part II
(Not Man's Gospel!, Part 23)

Text: Galatians 2:11-21

September 13, 2009

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

- I. Paul Confronts Peter's Contradiction of the Truth of the Gospel (2:11-13)
- II. Paul Clarifies Peter's Contradiction of the Truth of the Gospel (2:14-21)
 - A. Paul's Question, v. 14
 - B. Paul's Thesis, vv. 15-16

Verses 15-16 contain truths of the highest importance. In them, Paul sets forth the central thesis of his letter.

We saw in v. 15 how Paul began by reminding Peter of the worthlessness of relying upon one's religious observances (Judaism) and cultural heritage (φύσει, "by nature," "natural descent," a born and bred Jew) for justification before God.

In spite of all of the Jew's privileges of race and religion, Paul says that it was all worthless to make one right before God. Timothy George notes, "What Paul came to realize in coming to faith in Christ was not so much God's judgment against his wickedness, for that was a standard assumption of rabbinic Judaism, but rather God's indictment of Paul's goodness," (*Galatians*, p. 190).

One of the greatest barriers to man's justification is his "goodness" (cf. Philip. 3:4-9).

Again, Timothy George observes, "That which was dearest and most precious to him (i.e., Paul-J.F.), he came to realize, could not produce a right standing before God. In light of God's justifying grace, all that had been 'gain' was now 'loss,'" (*Galatians*, p. 190).

Peter's hypocrisy eclipsed the truth of the gospel by suggesting to the Galatians that their "loss" column actually belonged in the "gain" column (i.e., that a man is justified by the works of the Law [i.e., his goodness] plus faith in Christ).

Paul argues that attempting to gain God's favor by relying upon one's goodness or "good works" of any kind is worthless.

This brings us to v. 16 where Paul will define for us who is truly righteous and how this righteousness is obtained.

LESSON:

Paul uses three significant, loaded terms in v. 16 for the first time in this letter. All three terms are essential to understanding Galatians, essential to understanding the gospel and essential to the Christian faith and life.

The three terms are:

1. Justified
2. Works of the law
3. Faith in Christ

Paul repeats each term/phrase three times in one verse. Paul uses the verb “justified” three times. Three times he says that no one will be “justified by works of the law.” And, three times he says that justification comes by means of faith in Jesus alone.

Paul repeats himself with the greatest diligence in order to impress upon the Galatians (and us!) the truth of the gospel.

Paul’s whole focus and concern of vv. 15-21 is to unfold and impress upon his hearers the truth of the gospel, namely the doctrine of justification by faith alone (i.e., the Good News that unrighteous, condemned men and women can be declared righteous by God and brought into acceptance as His favored children, not because of their works but through faith in Christ alone).

Paul first sets forth his thesis in vv. 15-16 and then in vv. 17-21, he will defend it by dealing with some of the most common objections to it.

With this context in mind, let’s take a closer look at these three terms:

1. JUSTIFIED

Concerning the word *justified*, John Stott writes, “Nobody has understood Christianity who does not understand this word,” (*Galatians*, p. 59).

Martin Luther, writing of the importance of the doctrine of justification states, “...this is what is called ‘the truth of the gospel.’ It is also the main doctrine of Christianity, in which the knowledge of all godliness is comprehended. It is, therefore, extremely necessary that we come to know this doctrine well and constantly inculcate it (persistent, repeated admonition and teaching-J.F. “beat it into their heads continually”). For it is delicate and is easily bruised, as Paul had learned and as all the saints have often experienced,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 91).

Justification is the primary and fundamental blessing of the gospel. Justification is essential to the gospel, to the Christian faith and to the believer’s life. Luther rightly stated that justification is the article upon which the church (and believer-J.F.) stands or

falls.” All spiritual blessings and privileges (e.g., adoption and the Fatherhood of God) that come through the gospel rest upon justification. Hence, if the doctrine of justification is lost, then all is lost. J.I. Packer in his discussion of adoption explains,

“In Romans, Paul’s fullest exposition of his gospel- “the clearest gospel of all,” to Luther’s mind- justification through the cross of Christ is expounded first (chaps. 1-5), and made basic to everything else. Regularly Paul speaks of righteousness, remission of sins, and justification as the first and immediate consequence for us of Jesus’ death (Rom. 3:22-26; 2 Cor. 5:18-21; Gal. 3:13-14; Eph. 1:7; and so on). And as justification is the primary blessing, so it is the fundamental blessing, in the sense that everything else in our salvation assumes it, and rests on it- adoption included,” (*Knowing God*, pp. 206-207).

Because justification is so vital, what does it mean to be justified? What is justification?

Consider the following passages:

“If you, O LORD, should mark iniquities, O Lord, who could stand,” (Ps. 130:3)?

“Enter not into judgment with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you,” (Ps. 143:2; cf., Gal. 2:16).

“...how can a man be in the right before God,” (Job 9:2)?

All of these questions illustrate the fundamental issue at stake in justification and highlight the primary spiritual need of all men, namely:

“God is righteous. I am not righteous. How then can an unrighteous man ever hope to stand before the judgment of God and obtain the forgiveness of sin and be declared righteous in His sight?”

Justification addresses and answers this fundamental dilemma.

Justification in its proper sense is a legal term. It views God as judge. It brings to mind legal/trial/courtroom imagery. Evangelical Bible teachers commonly speak of it as being *forensic* (from the Latin word, *forum* meaning “law court,”).

To justify means “to absolve” anyone in a trial or “to hold” or declare “just.” It is the opposite of being “condemned” or “to accuse,” “to render a verdict of guilty.” Paul, in Romans 8:1, 33-34 writes,

“¹ There is therefore now *no condemnation* for those who are in Christ Jesus. ³³ Who shall bring any *charge against* God’s elect? *It is God who justifies.* ³⁴ Who is to *condemn*? Christ Jesus is the one who *died*—more than that, who was *raised*—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is *interceding for us*” (emphasis mine).

I once attended a court case with a family whose daughter had been violated by an older male. When the Judge ordered the defendant to rise for his sentencing, the weight of the law and the Judge's authority to enforce the law dominated the entire courtroom. The trial was over. There were no more appeals. There was no defense. The man was clearly guilty and deserving of a just punishment. Upon the man's sentencing, he was immediately handcuffed, taken into custody and imprisoned for his crime. The Judge's verdict of guilty and sentencing of the violator was a sobering occasion, to say the least.

To be condemned then is to be declared guilty and subject to punishment (in man's violation of God's law, God issues a death sentence, Rom. 5:18). However, to be justified is to be declared "not guilty," but "righteous." It is to be absolved of all guilt and to be free of all punishment, as Paul declares in Romans 8:1, "There is no death-sentence for those who are in Christ Jesus."

Let me ask you a question: Have you ever thought of yourself as a condemned criminal who has been issued a sentence of death for committing capital crimes of infinite and immeasurable indignity?

The Good News of justification is the gracious declaration of God, who as the just Judge, hands down a verdict of not guilty to the one who formerly stood condemned!

This is the first aspect of justification and thus only half of the story. There is more! It is not enough to be simply forgiven and then left morally neutral before God. Wayne Grudem explains,

"...if God merely declared us to be forgiven from our past sins, that would not solve our problems entirely, for it would only make us morally neutral before God. We would be in the state that Adam was in before he had done anything right or wrong in God's sight- he was not guilty before God, but neither had he earned a record of righteousness before God... We must rather move from a point of moral neutrality to a point of having positive righteousness before God, the righteousness of a life of perfect obedience to him... Therefore, the second aspect of justification is that God must declare us not to be merely neutral in his sight but actually to be righteous before him," (*Systematic Theology*, p. 725).

In justification, the sinner is not only declared not guilty but also declared to be righteous in God's sight. A sinner is not only pardoned but also counted (imputation) as if he or she possessed the same standing before God as Christ Himself. Hence, whatever the Father says of His Son He also says of the believer, "This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased," (Matt. 3:17)! Amazing!

In justification, the obedience and suffering of Christ are imputed to the believer in such a way that whatever was done by Him or endured by Him is reckoned as if we had done it ourselves (see Turretin, *Justification*, pp. 40, 48-49)!

Such is the staggering, glorious and joyful Good News of justification!

CONCLUSION:

When it comes to God's judgment and justification, we must keep in mind God's character.

Because God is just, He cannot show favor to, nor justify anyone without a perfect righteousness. Moreover, since the judgment of God is according to truth, he cannot pronounce anyone just who is not really just. Still further, because God is just, true and all-knowing, His judgment is according to perfect knowledge, truth and justice.

Thus, unlike human courts, there will be no mistrials, no hung juries, no kangaroo courts, no sham legal proceedings and no unjust rulings. God will not hold the guilty innocent and He will not hold the innocent guilty.

No evidence will remain concealed in God's courtroom. In His court, God, the perfect Judge, will bring all to light. Not only man's actions but also his inner thoughts, motives and attitudes will be known and judged by perfect justice.

In Psalm 69:5, David declares, "O God, you know my folly; the wrongs I have done are not hidden from you."

In Luke 8:17, Jesus speaking of the final judgment says, "...nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light," (cf. Lk. 12:2).

Imagine for a moment how you would feel if every thought, every sinful desire, every bad attitude, every wrong action and every unrighteous word you have ever spoken were put together and broadcast on national television for the whole world to see. Nothing is left out. Everything is brought into broad daylight and made totally visible.

This is the sobering reality of the fate that awaits all who are unjustified before God. Nothing will be hidden from God. There will be no "spin." All will be made manifest and come to light. All who stand before God, the Judge, without Christ will crumble under the weight of a perfectly just verdict of guilty.

However, the Good News of justification is that Jesus instead of your crimes of infinite indignity will span the entire broadcast! All that will be viewed is what Christ did and suffered in our place, which, by faith alone, is counted to us as if we had done it ourselves!

This is the point we are making concerning justification: Because God is perfectly just, He cannot show favor to and justify anyone who is not perfectly just.

Though He has the power to forgive sin and grant life, He cannot do so unless a satisfaction is first made by which His justice is satisfied, His law fulfilled and punishment is taken for sin.

The Good News is that Christ, our Surety, has perfectly fulfilled the law, satisfied God's justice and fully exhausted punishment for our sin! Hallelujah! What a Savior! Will you trust Him today for your justification?

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