

Justified by Faith in Christ Alone

July 24 2022 Sermon

Galatians 2:15,16,20,21

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Today we will be looking at question 30 from the New City Catechism. I will read the question, and together we will read the answer.

Question 30: What is faith in Jesus Christ?

Answer: Faith in Jesus Christ is acknowledging the truth of everything that God has revealed in his Word, trusting in him, and also receiving and resting on him alone for salvation as he is offered to us in the gospel.

Some people think that faith in Jesus Christ is based on ignorance. But that is not the case. Today's catechism says that faith involves the knowledge of God's revelation in the gospel. Faith is the conviction that God's Word is true, and therefore you commit yourself fully to it. So, true faith is not blind at all.

Of course, we all must believe something if we want to know or do anything at all. For example, I was born on July 26. How do I know this? My parents told me so. And I've never doubted that my parents are my true parents. Moreover, I've never done any DNA test. Yet, I still believe they are my parents. This also applies to our relationships. You can never know and relate to anyone unless you are willing to trust him or her.

Friends: whatever we attempt to do in life is founded on faith. To know anything truly, we need to believe that we will know it in the first place. So, how does this apply to justification?

Let's read together Galatians 2:15,16, 20, and 21.

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

20 I've been crucified with Christ.

It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Let's read together Isaiah 40:8.

"The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever."

Let's pray.

Gracious Father, we come before you, asking for the blessing on the preaching of Your Word. We pray that Your Spirit would enlighten our minds and hearts. As Your Word is preached, help us to see Jesus nearly, love Him dearly, and serve Him well. And it's in Jesus's name we pray and believe. Amen.

Galatians is a letter that Paul wrote to the Galatian church to help them resist false teachers in their community. The false teachers said, "[non-Jews] must be circumcised in order to complete their conversion to Christianity." In Galatians 1:8, Paul calls this idea a different gospel because it's a false path to salvation.

In our passage we find one of the fundamental teachings of Christianity: Justification is by faith in Christ alone. Martin Luther was a 16th-Century pastor. Luther said, "justification is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls." But what is justification? It's an act of God's pure grace through which, by faith, we are declared righteous before God because of Christ's righteousness.

Two points for today:

Point 1: By faith in Christ alone, we are justified (verses 15,16)

Point 2: By faith in Christ alone, we live for God (verses 20,21)

To discuss Point 1, let's look at verse 15 again:

"15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;"

Paul is teaching that no one can be justified by birth. It must be by faith in Christ alone. The Jews of Paul's time thought they were morally superior to the "Gentile sinners" around them. But Paul emphasizes that everyone, Jew and Gentile sinners, is justified by faith in Christ alone. As we heard from last week's sermon, Christ did not come for the self-righteous, but rather for those who know themselves to be sinners.

Jesus said in Luke 5:32:

"32 I've not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance."

From verse 15 you can tell that non-Jews had a bad reputation among the Jews. They were "Gentile sinners." But even Gentile sinners can be declared righteous before God, when they have faith in Christ Jesus alone. In Genesis 15:6, the very first book of the Bible, we read, "And [Abraham] believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness." By the way, Abraham was not a Jew.

"Counted" can also be translated "credited." These are banking terms. Imagine a person who is bankrupt. He has zero dollars in his bank account. But he has an infinite debt to pay. He is incapable of paying the debt, until money is credited on his account.

Like this person, we are all righteousness-bankrupt without Christ. We have no righteousness of our own that can make us right with God. Our debt is infinite because we sin against an infinitely holy God. We cannot pay this debt. But when you believe that Christ died and rose again to pay your debt, his infinite and perfect righteousness is credited on your account. And your infinite debt is paid.

Friends: if someone pays an infinite debt that you could not pay, how should you respond to him? Well, I would gladly surrender all my life to him. And this is what Abraham did, even when the promise of the coming Christ was still in the future. Like Abraham, when you believe, Christ's righteousness is credited on your account. And because it is Christ who pays this infinite debt, no one can claim to have merited his justification before God.

Because we are not justified by the works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus alone. That is what Paul teaches in verse 16, using very strong language. Listen to it again:

16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

Think about two marathon runners: Jay and Billy. After Jay runs he realizes that he has completed 26.2 miles, except that he has run to the wrong destination! By the time he finishes, he is very exhausted. He is also very frustrated. Although he has run the full distance, he won't get the prize. Why? Because he didn't run to the right destination. On the other hand, Billy runs 26.2 miles to the right destination. Yes, Billy is exhausted. But he is excited about the prize offered to him. Both Jay and Billy ran the same distance, but they ran in two different directions. Like these two people, the unbeliever and the believer are running in two different directions. The unbeliever is running towards self-glory while the believer is running towards God's glory. Unless Christ saves the unbeliever and changes his destination, he will continue to pursue his own self-glorifying desires. This will continue to tire him and make his life miserable.

We were created for the glory of God. We can only find true joy and satisfaction in life if we pursue God and his glory. But because of sin, our default mode is to seek our own glory. This only leads to exhaustion and frustration. It reveals how lost we are. But when we put our faith in Christ, there is hope in Him. Only He alone can bring us into a right standing with God. Only in Christ are we able to run towards God and give Him the glory He deserves.

Before his conversion, Paul was a Pharisee. He tried very hard to earn God's favor by persecuting Christians. He thought that by this he could be justified. In Galatians 2:17 Paul says that through his own efforts, he found himself to be a sinner. Paul discovered how terrible he was when he saw that he was running hard to the wrong destination. He was pursuing his own glory by trying to earn righteousness. But when Paul clung to Jesus in faith, he found deliverance. When we, too, put our faith in Christ, he saves us from this terrible situation.

I love a children's story by Sally Lloyd-Jones about believing and doubting. She writes, "Imagine you're on a hike up a big mountain and you lose your foothold. Just before you plunge over to the precipice, you spot a branch. Do you need to believe in that branch for it to save you? You don't worry about that--you just grab it! Faith is like grabbing on to that branch. We just reach out for God. And He is the one who saves us. Our strong God is the one who rescues us--not our strong faith. Because faith isn't just you holding on to God. It's God holding on to you."

Isaiah, as he was prophesying about the coming of Christ, refers to him as the Branch. In Isaiah 11:1, he writes, "I There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a Branch from his roots shall bear fruit."

Friends, because of our rebellious hearts, left to ourselves, we will run to the wrong destination and fall into a profound pit of God's condemnation. We need to grab to this Branch that Isaiah prophesied about, which is Christ Jesus. You don't need to understand everything about this Branch in the beginning. You simply need to trust in him, because your sin problem is urgent. You need someone to rescue you. As such, you must put your faith in Christ alone, or you will perish. And because the strength of our faith will not save us, you and I need a righteousness that is not our own in order to be justified. This is the righteousness that we receive by faith in Christ alone. And by this same faith, we have Christ's resurrection life in us, and we live for Him.

Point 2: By faith in Christ alone, we live for God (verses 20,21)

Verses 20 and 21 show that justification by faith alone lead to true and right living.

Let's look at verse 20 together now.

20 " I've been crucified with Christ.

It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Paul says: "I've been crucified with Christ." Obviously, Paul did not go on the cross with Jesus. Paul's old sinful ways were killed with Christ and this had a lasting impact on Paul's life.

Paul explains in Galatians 5:24 that our flesh, with all its passions and desires, was crucified with Jesus. Through the Spirit's power, our sinful thoughts and actions do not control us like they did before. Because they have been killed on the cross. Yes, we still struggle with sin. But because the Spirit of God lives in us, we receive power to kill sin and live for Christ who loved us and died for us.

In verse 20, Paul goes on to say:

"20 It's no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me."

The resurrected Christ is alive in us, my friends!

We have true and abundant life because Christ who lives in us rose from the dead never to die again.

In verse 20, Paul also adds:

"20 And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

After we are saved by faith in Christ we continue to live by faith in Him.

We depend and cling to the self-giving love of Jesus.

Just like our cars cannot operate without gas, we will fail unless we continue to trust in Christ alone.

In verse 21 Paul responds to objections of those who think that this good news of grace would lead to immoral living. He writes:

"21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."

If anyone could become righteous before God through the works of the law, it would mean that Christ died in vain. To believe that eternal and true life might be found apart from Christ Jesus is to reject the grace of God. None of us can be justified by his

or her own works. Therefore we do not take the grace of God for granted. Both the morally decent person and the immoral person are challenged by the grace of God, to live for the Resurrected Christ and not for themselves. We are all challenged to stop running away from God, and begin running to God and pursuing His glory. The Judaizers were misleading the Galatians by telling them to be circumcised to complete their justification. But Paul shows that sinners of both Jewish and Gentile descent need to trust in Christ alone for them to be justified before God.

Being born in a Christian family or nation will not save anyone. Parents have the responsibility of clearly explaining the gospel to their children. However, children can only be saved when they put their faith in Christ alone for their salvation. This is the only way anyone is justified before God.

Friends, apart from Christ, we are all righteousness-bankrupt before God. We need an external, infinite, and perfect righteousness to be deposited into our bankrupt account. Thanks be to God, because Christ has done this by his death and resurrection. Jesus has credited his infinite righteousness into our accounts! And there is more. Jesus has done this once and for all, and for all those who believe in Him, both now and in the time to come. Christ's righteousness is not like the dollar that's inflating right now. We receive from Jesus a righteousness that can never devalue or run out. A believer's standing before the Father is eternally secure. When God the Father sees us, He sees the righteousness of Christ credited on our account. This is a miracle that no person can do. Praise God for justifying sinners like you and me.

If you don't trust in Jesus yet, I need to tell you some bad news. Your good works or reckless immoral living will not justify you, because they are dead works and filthy rags. But there is good news! Christ is willing and ready to save you today. Don't let your conscience make you linger. I plead with you. Trust in Jesus Christ for your right standing before God. He is the only one who can provide the righteousness that you desperately need. Only when you receive it will you begin to truly live as you live for the Resurrected Christ.

I will say something more, to you who are believers in Christ Jesus. Remember that the Christian life is not about how strong your faith is. It is about who you put your faith in. Though your faith will seem weak sometimes, Christ your Savior is strong and kind. Remember how you came to faith. You were dead but He raised you from the dead and gave you a new life. He alone gave you the gift of faith, therefore He alone can sustain it to the end. Do not try to rely on your own strength. Rather, as Proverbs 3:5-6 says:

"5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths."


Jesus Christ is the Good Shepherd. He does not justify us and then leave us to our spiritual journey by ourselves.

Friends: when your faith is weak, remember that Christ died for you. He died to do what we could not do. Continue clinging on

Him despite all the trials in your life. He is faithful. Because He loves you, He will never let you go. You belong to Him eternally, and He will never leave you nor forsake you.

Let's pray.

Lord Jesus, our faith is often weak. But you're strong and kind to restore us back to yourself. Kindly remind us of the fact that you're the one who justifies us by faith and that those you save belong to you forever. Help those who may have heard this message for the first time to believe in you. Those of us who know you, Lord, strengthen our faith. We pray that your Spirit will continue to glorify you as He brings us into the Father's presence now and forever more. Kindly help us all to find our rest and peace in your justifying work. We pray this, trusting in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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