



What We Should Know About Justification

Brownsburg Church of Christ

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AM Assembly



Introduction:

I love it when Paul writes “we know.” Generally, when he uses that phrase, he is explaining not just what he knew, but something he considered so fundamental all Christians knew it, or should. If my count is correct, he used the phrase that way 13 times. He said things like “we know that for those who love God all things work together for good” (**Romans 8:28**, ESV). And “we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (**I Timothy 1:8**, ESV). And “we know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin” (**Romans 6:8**, ESV). The passage I’d like us to notice today is **Galatians 2:16**: “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” (ESV). Examine this passage and learn what we should know about justification.

Discussion:

I. Justified

- A. “Justified” is a legal term. It is a word picture of someone who has been on trial and then declared innocent or righteous. **Matthew 12:36-37** provides a clear picture of justification. When we stand before the judge, we will either be condemned or we will be justified. Condemned means to be declared guilty. Justified means to be declared innocent. Technically speaking, justification is not a statement of actual innocence, but rather defines the finding of the court. Thus, many of us will remember that O.J. Simpson was justified by the criminal courts. That is, he was declared or pronounced innocent of the murders of Nicole Brown Simpson and Ronald Goldman, though, nationally, few people believed him to actually be innocent. That is, he was justified by the court, though many believe he was actually guilty.
- B. This is important to us because **Hebrews 9:27** explains we all die and then comes judgment. We are going to stand on trial, if you will, before the Great Judge. According to **John 5:25-30**, condemnation will mean a resurrection of judgment; justification will mean a resurrection of life. In eternity, we want to be justified. That is we want to be declared righteous. Therefore, we grasp David’s statement in **Psalms 32:1-2**. The man whose sin is covered by God is blessed. The woman against whom God does not count iniquity is blessed.
- C. But we have a problem. We are guilty. We have sinned. Every last one of us. **Romans 3:23** clarifies that we have all sinned. Where does that leave us? What can we do? We are going to stand on trial, and we are guilty. Further, we will be standing on trial before the Great Judge who cannot be fooled. He knows our guilt. We won’t be justified based on a loophole in the legal technicalities. We won’t be justified because of lack of evidence against us. We won’t be justified our rights were not adequately explained. We won’t be justified because the jury is hung. In fact, it seems there is no hope of justification at all. But **Psalms 32:1-2** begs to differ. It gives us hope. It claims there are some people against whom God will not count iniquity. There are some whose sins will be covered. There are some who will be justified, declared innocent, because God will not take their sins into account. Who are those people? How can we be one of those people? That is what **Galatians 2:16** is explaining.

II. We are not justified by works of law.

- A. If **Galatians 2:16** nails anything down for us, it nails down that we are not justified by works of the Law. I don’t want to spend much time in this point, because we have made this point repeatedly in previous lessons.
- B. To recap what we’ve learned. The only way to be justified or declared innocent by law, is by keeping it perfectly (**James 2:10**). We’ve admitted earlier that our very problem is we have violated God’s law. Therefore, no set of legal requirements can justify us, whether from the Old Law or the New Law. Since we have all sinned, the only thing God’s law can do is judge and condemn us (**Romans 2:12**).
- C. Therefore, it makes absolutely no sense to try to justify ourselves based on our ability to keep God’s law. Further, it makes no sense to try to be justified by the attempt at keeping God’s law. **Romans 9:30-33** demonstrates that trying to be righteous or even declared righteous by pursuing a law will just not work.
- D. Is Paul saying it doesn’t matter how we live? Absolutely not. Consider the next point he makes about justification.

III. We are justified through faith in Jesus Christ.

- A. Twice in this one verse (**Galatians 2:16**) Paul claims we are justified by faith in Jesus. But what does justification by faith mean? As we learned from a previous lesson based on **Hebrews 11:1**, faith is the conviction of what we

haven't seen with our own eyes. Peter talks about this faith in **I Peter 1:6-9**. We haven't seen Jesus, but we believe in Him. What exactly do we believe about Him? According to **Romans 10:9-10**, we believe two things. 1) God raised Him from the dead. And 2) He is Lord.

- B. Justifying faith first believes that Jesus was raised from the dead. Though Paul only references this one part of the core gospel message, I believe he is referring to the entirety of it as described in **I Corinthians 15:1-5**. We must believe the gospel message. Jesus died for our sins, was buried, then arose on the third day just as Scripture had promised. Further, there are three very important aspects of faith in the resurrection demonstrated in **Romans**.
1. Believing God raised Jesus from the dead means believing He is God's Son (**Romans 1:4**). Jesus is more than a man, more than a good teacher. He is God's Son. **John 5:17-18** explains the real import of this. This isn't sonship in the generic sense that all mankind are God's offspring. This is the very specific sense that Jesus, by the resurrection, was declared to be the one and only Son of God and is equal with God.
 2. Further, death has no dominion over Jesus Christ (**Romans 6:9**). Jesus has been raised from the dead, never to die again. In Jesus is life (**John 1:4**). He is life (**John 14:6**). **John 6:35** says Jesus is the bread of life and whoever believes in Him will never thirst. This necessarily leads to the third point.
 3. Jesus is life, if I want life, I have to turn to Him (**Romans 8:11**). Though we are overrun with death because of our sins, Jesus is life. In Him, we will have life.
 4. Justifying faith recognizes every bit of this. Though the one believing may not articulate it in these three points, the one with this faith understands this, turning to Jesus as the source of life and resurrection.
- C. Justifying faith further believes that Jesus is Lord. Don't be confused, while Paul talks about the confession that comes from the mouth, remember that whatever comes out of the mouth, proceeds from the heart (**Matthew 15:18**). Therefore, this confession is based on what is believed in the heart. But it also gives some insight about justifying faith. Justifying faith cannot remain in the heart. It has to come out in words and actions.
1. **Romans 12:11** explains what this belief means for us. If we believe Jesus is Lord, we'll serve Him. This is so much more than simply saying the words or agreeing to the statement. As Jesus said in **Luke 6:46**, what good is confessing Him as Lord with our mouths if we will not do as He says. **Matthew 7:21-23** claims the same.
 2. Believing that Jesus is Lord means believing He should be in control of our lives. No wonder **Galatians 2:20** describes the life of the one justified by faith as a crucified life that is living based on that faith.
 3. Finally, notice Paul's quote in **Romans 10:11**, which hearkens back to the fuller quote of **Romans 9:33**. When we believe in Jesus, we will not be put to shame because He is the cornerstone God has laid. The purpose of a cornerstone is to be the starting point for measuring anything in the building. The foundation, the walls, the roof are all measured from the cornerstone. For a house to be stable, straight, and square, it has to begin with a good cornerstone. Then everything has to be measured from that cornerstone. When the house is built from a good cornerstone, there is no shame. We can continue to build every aspect of our building and know that all of it will work properly because we started in the right place. Believing Jesus is Lord means actually making Jesus my cornerstone. And why wouldn't I do this. Since I believe God raised Him from the dead, I believe He is life and life is in Him. Therefore, I want my life based on Him. That is justifying faith.
- D. Does this sound like Paul is saying that we will be justified no matter how we live? Of course not. Rather, when we grasp **Galatians 2:16** in context, we grasp that I cannot save myself by working, as Paul teaches in **Romans 4:4-5**. But we also grasp that I am not saved if I am not working, as James teaches in **James 2:17-22**. Justifying faith means believing Jesus' way really works and, therefore, really working Jesus' way. Let's get it down to brass tacks, considering a practical illustration. Think about why you and I are attending this assembly this morning. Some argue and fuss about how many assemblies we have to attend because they seem to think that by going to the assembly properly they can achieve justification. Some are convinced that means every assembly, so they attend them all, and they smugly and self-righteously look at the sinful crowd that only comes on Sunday morning. Others think they've done enough to get to heaven if they get to an assembly each week. They smugly accuse the others of being legalists never recognizing they make the exact same mistake. I pray however that you are here because you believe Jesus is life and is Lord and you know that by assembling with us you are connecting to Him. I think that kind of justifying faith may impact how often we make it to the assemblies and it will make the assemblies we actually attend affective for our justification.

Conclusion:

Paul believed Peter should have known this. Paul believed the Galatians Christians should have known these things. We need to know these things. Justification is an amazing blessing. We want to be justified, declared innocent. But we won't be able to justify ourselves by keeping God's Law. We can only be justified by faith in Jesus Christ—faith in His resurrection and Lordship. Do you have justifying faith?