

# Justification<sup>1</sup> by Faith Alone



## SABBATH—OCTOBER 15

**READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON:** Galatians 2:15–21; Ephesians 2:12; Philippians 3:9; Romans 3:10–20; Genesis 15:5, 6; Romans 3:8.

**MEMORY VERSE:** “I have been crucified [hung on a cross] with Christ. I don’t [do not] live any longer. Christ lives in me. My faith in the Son of God helps me to live my life in my body. He loved me. He gave himself for me” (Galatians 2:20, NlrV).

**AS WE LEARNED LAST WEEK, PAUL OPENLY CHALLENGED PETER IN ANTIOCH FOR NOT PRACTICING WHAT HE PREACHED.** For example, Peter’s decision not to eat with Gentiles (non-Jews) suggested that they were second-rate Christians. Peter’s actions suggested that if the Gentiles really wanted to be part of the family of God and enjoy fellowshiping with the Jews, they must first be circumcised.<sup>2</sup>

What did Paul say to Peter during this serious situation? In this week’s lesson, we will study the verses that tell us what really happened. These verses in the New Testament hold very important lessons for us. This is because they introduce us to several groups of words that help us better understand the gospel and the rest of Paul’s letter to the Galatians. These key (important) words are *justification*, *righteousness*,<sup>3</sup> *works of law*, *belief*, and not only *faith*, but even *the faith of Jesus*.

What does Paul mean by these words? What do the words teach us about the plan of salvation?

1. justification—forgiveness of sins; cleansing.

2. circumcised—having the skin (called the foreskin) cut off at the end of the penis of a man or boy.

3. righteousness—God’s character (the qualities, such as goodness and love, that make Him who He is). God’s character, or righteousness (holy life) is given to us by faith in Him; holiness.

**SUNDAY—OCTOBER 16**

**THE QUESTION OF  
“JUSTIFICATION”  
(Galatians 2:15, 16)**

In Galatians 2:15, Paul writes, “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile [non-Jewish] sinners” (ESV). What point do you think he is making?

We need to understand Paul’s words according to his time. Paul tries to win over his fellow Jewish Christians to his position. He starts with something they would agree with. He wants to show the long-standing difference between Jews and Gentiles. Jews were the chosen people of God. They were to protect and uphold His law. They enjoyed a full relationship with God. Gentiles were not given the law of God. And they were outside the covenants (agreements) of promise (Ephesians 2:12; Romans 2:14). But in verse 16, Paul warns the Jewish Christians that their spiritual rights do not make them better than Gentiles in God’s eyes, because no one is justified<sup>4</sup> by “works of the law” (ESV).

**Paul uses the word *justified* four times in Galatians 2:16, 17. What does he mean? Study Exodus 23:7 and Deuteronomy 25:1.**



**God chose the Jewish nation to protect and uphold the law.**

The verb *to justify* is an important word for Paul. Of the 39 times the word shows up in the New Testament, 27 are in Paul’s letters. He uses it eight times in Galatians, including four examples in Galatians 2:16, 17.

*Justification* is a legal word, used in courts of law. It deals with the sentence a judge announces when a person is innocent of the charges brought against him or her. It is the opposite of *condemnation* (being judged guilty). More so, the words *just* and *righteous* come from the same Greek word. This Greek word means that when a person is judged as “justified,” he or she also is judged as “righteous [holy].” So, justification involves more than simply pardon or forgiveness. It is the positive announcement that a person is righteous too.

4. justified—made righteous by God’s grace.

But some of the Jewish believers thought that to be “justified” also meant that a person was thought to be a faithful member of God’s covenant-keeping community (group), the family of Abraham.

**What is Paul saying to you in Galatians 2:15–17? How can you use these words in your own Christian experience?**

### MONDAY—OCTOBER 17

#### WORKS OF THE LAW (Romans 3:20, 28)

**Paul says three times in Galatians 2:16 that a person is not justified by “works of the law” (ESV). What does he mean by the wording “works of the law”? How do the verses Galatians 2:16, 17; Galatians 3:2, 5, 10; and Romans 3:20, 28 help us understand his meaning?**

Before we can understand the wording “the works of the law,” we first need to understand what Paul means by the word *law*. The word *law* (*nomos* in Greek) is found 121 times in Paul’s letters. It can mean several different things. It can mean God’s will for His people, the first five books of Moses, the entire Old Testament, or even just a general principle (important rule). But Paul uses it mostly to mean all of God’s commandments given to His people through Moses.

The wording “the works of the law” means all the requirements (laws and rules) found in the commandments given by God through Moses, both the moral (Ten Commandments) and the ceremonial laws.<sup>5</sup> Paul’s point is that we may try very hard to follow and obey God’s law. But our obedience never will be good enough for God to justify us. Nor will it make us good enough for God to declare us righteous. That is because His law requires perfect faithfulness in thought and action. This is necessary not just some of the time but all of the time. And this is not just for some of His commandments but for all of them.

The wording “works of the law” does not show up in the Old Testament and is not found in the New Testament outside of Paul. But strong support for its meaning came forth in 1947 with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls are a collection of writings copied by a group of Jews, called Essenes, who lived at the time of Jesus. Written in Hebrew, one of the scrolls holds this exact wording. The scroll’s title is *Miqsat Ma’ase Ha-Torah*, which can be translated as “Important Works of the Law.” The scroll describes a number of issues based on law in the Bible. It discusses how holy things are to be kept pure and mark the Jews out as separate from the Gentiles. At the end the author writes that if these “works of the law” are followed, “you will be reckoned [counted as] righteous”

5. moral and ceremonial laws—God’s law had two parts. (1) The moral law is the Ten Commandments. They will continue forever. (2) The ceremonial law was the animal sacrifices that represented Jesus’ future death. When Jesus died, the ceremonial law was not needed anymore.

before God. Unlike Paul, the author does not offer his readers righteousness that comes by faith but by good behavior (actions).

**In your experience, how well do you keep God’s law? Do you really sense that you keep it so well that you can be justified before God on the basis of your law keeping? (Read Romans 3:10–20.) If not, why not? And how does your answer help you understand Paul’s point here?**



God’s law requires perfect faithfulness in thought and action.

**TUESDAY—OCTOBER 18**

**THE BASIS OF (REASON FOR)  
OUR JUSTIFICATION  
(Philippians 3:9)**

We should not say that Jewish Christians were suggesting that faith in Christ was not important because the truth was they were all believers in Jesus. They all had faith in Him. But their behavior (actions) showed that they felt faith was not enough by

itself. It must come with obedience, and our obedience must be a part of the act of justification itself. The Jews would have argued that justification was by both faith and works. The way Paul often shows the sharp difference between faith in Christ and the works of the law also shows his strong opposition to (action against) this kind of “both and” reasoning. Faith, and faith alone, is the basis of (reason for) justification.

For Paul, too, faith is not just a difficult-to-understand idea. It is always connected to Jesus. In fact, the wording translated twice as “faith in Christ” in Galatians 2:16 is far richer than any translation can really explain (ESV). The wording in Greek is translated as “the faith” or “the faithfulness” of Jesus. This translation shows the powerful difference Paul is making between the works of the law that we do and the work Christ has done for us. This work is the work that Jesus, through His faithfulness (which is why it is called the “faithfulness of Jesus”), has done for us.

It is important to remember that faith itself does not make justification, as if faith earned the credit for doing the work. Instead, faith just opens the way for us to take hold of Christ and His works for our good. We are not justified on the basis of our faith but on the basis of Christ’s faithfulness for us. It is the only righteousness that we claim for ourselves through faith.

Christ did what every person has failed to do. Christ alone was faithful to God in everything He did. Our hope is in Christ’s faithfulness, not our own. As one author puts it, “We believe in

Christ, not that we might be justified by that belief. Instead, we believe in Christ so that we might be justified by His faith(fulness) to God.”—Adapted from John McRay, *Paul: His Life and Teaching* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2003), page 355.

An early translation of Galatians 2:16 shows Paul’s meaning well: “Therefore we know that a man is not justified from the works of the law. Instead, he is justified by the faith of Jesus the Messiah [Chosen One]. And we believe in Jesus the Messiah. From his faith, we also believe we might be justified, and not from the works of the law”—Adapted from a Syriac translation in Aramaic. (Syriac and Aramaic are two languages that were spoken in Bible times.)

**How do Romans 3:22, 26; Galatians 3:22; Ephesians 3:12; and Philippians 3:9, with today’s study, help us understand the wonderful truth that Christ’s faithfulness for us, and His perfect obedience to God, are the only reasons for our salvation?**



**We not saved on the basis of our faith but on the basis of Christ’s faithfulness for us.**

## WEDNESDAY—OCTOBER 19

### THE OBEDIENCE OF FAITH (John 3:14–16)

Paul makes it clear that faith is the foundation of the Christian life. Faith is the way for us to claim the promises we have in Christ. But what is faith exactly? What does it involve?

**What do Genesis 15:5, 6; John 3:14–16; 2 Corinthians 5:14, 15; and Galatians 5:6 teach us about where faith comes from?**

True biblical faith always starts with an answer to God. Faith is not some kind of feeling or attitude that humans one day decide to have because God asks for it. Instead, true faith begins in a heart touched with a sense of thankfulness and love for God’s goodness. That is why when the Bible talks about faith, this faith always follows what God has done for us. For example, Abraham’s faith is his answer to the wonderful promises God makes to him (Genesis 15:5, 6). In the New Testament Paul says that faith comes from our understanding of what Christ did for us on the cross.

**If faith is an answer to God, what should that answer include? Study what John 8:32, 36; Acts 10:43; Romans 1:5, 8; Romans 6:17; Hebrews 11:6; and James 2:19 say about faith.**

Many people describe faith as “belief.” This description causes a problem.

This is because in Greek the word for “faith” is the noun form of the verb “to believe.” To use one form to describe the other is the same as saying “faith is to have faith.” It tells us nothing.

A careful study of the Bible shows that faith is knowledge about God and a mental acceptance of that knowledge. This is one reason why it is important for us to have a correct picture of God. False ideas about the character of God<sup>6</sup> really can make it more difficult for us to have faith. But mental acceptance of the gospel is not enough. This is because “even the demons believe” (James 2:19, NIV). True faith also influences the way a person lives. In Romans 1:5, Paul writes about the “obedience of faith” (ESV). Paul is not saying that obedience is the same as faith. He means true faith influences a person’s whole life, not just the mind. It requires giving ourselves fully to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, not just obeying a list of rules. Faith is as much what we do, how we live, and in whom we trust, as it is in what we believe.



**Faith is the foundation of the Christian life.**

## THURSDAY—OCTOBER 20

### DOES FAITH ENCOURAGE SIN? (Galatians 2:17, 18)

One of the main charges against Paul was that his gospel of justification by faith alone encouraged people to sin (read Romans 3:8 and Romans 6:1). No doubt Paul’s enemies thought that if people do not have to keep the law to be accepted by God, why should they worry about how they live?

#### **How does Paul in Galatians 2:17, 18 answer the charge that justification by faith alone encourages sinful actions?**

Paul answers his enemies’ charges with the strongest words possible: “God forbid!” It is possible that a person might fall into sin after coming to Christ. But the responsibility would certainly not belong to Christ. If we break the law, we ourselves are the lawbreakers.

#### **In Galatians 2:19–21, how does Paul describe his connection with Jesus Christ? In what way does this answer stop the arguments of his enemies?**

Paul finds the reasoning of his opponents to be very foolish. Accepting Christ by faith is not something small. It is not a game of heavenly make-believe. God does not count a person as righteous if there is no real change

6. character of God—who God is; having and understanding the character of God is the same as being kind, loving, honest, pure, and so on. God’s law (Ten Commandments) shows us His character.

in how that person lives. Instead, to accept Christ by faith is life changing. It involves a complete connection with Christ. It is a union (connection) with Him through His death and resurrection (return to life from the dead). Spiritually speaking, Paul says we are crucified with Christ. And our old sinful ways, rooted in selfishness, are finished (Romans 6:5–14). We have made clean breaks from the past. Everything is new (2 Corinthians 5:17). We also have been raised to new lives in Christ. The resurrected Christ lives within us. Daily, He is making us more and more like Himself.

So, faith in Christ is not a cover-up for sin. Instead, it is a call to a much deeper, richer relationship with Christ than could ever be found in a law-based religion.

**How do you relate to the idea of salvation by faith alone without the works of the law? Does it scare you a little? Does it make you think that it can be an excuse for sin? Or do you rejoice in it? What does your answer say about your understanding of salvation?**

#### FRIDAY—OCTOBER 21

**ADDITIONAL STUDY:** “God has warned me again and again of the people having false ideas of justification by faith. He has shown me for years that Satan would work in a special way to confuse the mind on this point. And ministers [preachers] have

failed to preach the right relationship between Jesus Christ and the law. It is the same thing that Cain did with his offering. God has shown me that many have been kept from the faith because of the mixed, confused ideas of salvation. This is because the ministers have worked to reach hearts in the wrong way. For years God has focused on my mind that it is important to share with people the proper understanding of how we are made righteous in Christ. . . .

“There is no point more important for people to understand than that it is impossible for sinners to earn salvation by their own best works. Salvation is through faith in Jesus Christ alone.”  
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Faith and Works*, pages 18, 19.

“The law demands righteousness, and this the sinner owes to the law. But he cannot do it! The only way he can do it is through faith. By faith the sinner can bring to God what he gets from Christ. Then the Lord places the obedience of His Son to the sinner’s account. Christ’s righteousness is accepted in place of man’s failure. Then God receives, pardons, and justifies the believing soul who repents.<sup>7</sup> God also treats him as though he were righteous, and loves him as He loves His Son.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, book 1, page 367.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

❶ In the first quote given above, Ellen G. White says that there is no subject

7. repents—to say you are sorry for sinning and to turn away from sin with the help of the Holy Spirit.

more important than justification by faith. As a class, discuss whether her comments are as necessary for us today as they were when she wrote them over a hundred years ago. If so, why?

② Why does Paul say in Galatians 2:21 that Christ would have died for no purpose if justification were through the law? What does Paul mean by that?