

Text— Galatians 2:16-21

Fellow redeemed sinners, redeemed by the blood of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ,

Today is Reformation Day, the day on which we especially thank God for His servant Martin Luther whom God moved to proclaim His holy Law in its full sternness and the Gospel of Christ in its full sweetness while placing the Holy Bible into the hands of common folks who had been without it. Luther's German translation of the Holy Bible – as completed and polished before his death – was accurate to the God-given and preserved Old Testament Hebrew Masoretic text and the New Testament Greek Received text.

My friends, we are greatly blessed to this very day in that we still have the Word of God in its full truth and purity in English in the King James Version Holy Bible, which is based upon the same God-given and preserved Hebrew and Greek texts as is the Luther Bible of old. Furthermore, we still have Luther's doctrine pure as drawn from the Holy Scriptures— the greatest doctrine being the glorious Gospel of Jesus Christ, the one true Savior of the world, "the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (John 1:14)

In Luther's day the church at large was entrenched in the false doctrine of works-righteousness and taught the common people they could actually buy the forgiveness of sins with money. The Roman Catholic Church sold indulgences to people— so-called letters-of-pardon. Thankfully, God raised up Martin Luther to protest the sale of indulgences, for on October 31, 1517 Luther posted his 95 theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenburg Germany which brought the issue forward for debate. Here's a sample: sentence #32 states, "Those who believe that through letters of pardon they may be sure of their salvation will go to hell, together with their teachers." And, sentence #62 declares, "The true treasure of the Church is the holy Gospel of the glory and grace of God."

The result of Luther's posting of the theses and the debates which followed was that the church was split. Luther and those who followed him clung to the truths of God as Romans 3:20-26 proclaims, "Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus." Yes, only sincere heart-deep faith in Jesus Christ personally receives the forgiveness of sins and salvation; no one can earn the forgiveness of sins and salvation by his or her own works, nor can anyone buy the forgiveness of sins with money, "For the redemption of their soul is precious, and it ceaseth for ever," as Psalm 49:8 relates.

Thus, our sermon text is certainly appropriate for us to contemplate this day as it forcefully teaches:

"JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE"

With that as our theme, may we, in view of our text and with the help of the Holy Ghost, see—

- 1) What it means that justification is by faith alone
- 2) Why the doctrine of justification by faith alone must be upheld

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Verse 16, ----- (Galatians 2:16)

As we ponder our Scripture selection it behooves us to keep in mind the full context of the words lest we draw any wrong conclusions. Observe in

the opening verse of our text that the term “justified” is used three times. The original Greek word translated into English as “justified” is: **δικαιῶ** *dikaiōō*, *dik-ah-yo'-o* meaning, “to render (i.e. show or regard as) just or innocent.” So, take it to heart that to be “justified” is to be graciously declared righteous by God, as is also evident from the words found in the closing verse of our text, “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.” (Galatians 2:21)

Now, our text opens by clearly stating we are to be found, *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

Note well that the works of the Law – our own works – are TOTALLY EXCLUDED from our being JUSTIFIED! By the works of the LAW shall NO FLESH be justified!

My friends, God demands and commands perfection, for we read in Leviticus 19:2, “Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God am holy.” Furthermore, consider the Ten Commandments as given by God and recorded in Exodus chapter twenty, for again and again God says: “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not”; God does NOT say: “just try your best and that will be good enough to satisfy me.” No, the truth is that which Isaiah 64:6 plainly states, where we read, “we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf; and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away.” Yes, even our best works are in themselves filthy in the sight of the high and holy God because we who do the works are sinners, for we must all confess as did David the psalmist in Psalm 51:5, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” Therefore, I repeat what I said earlier in accord with our sermon text: the works of the Law – our own works – are TOTALLY EXCLUDED from our being JUSTIFIED. By the works of the LAW shall NO

FLESH be justified!

That which alone justifies is FAITH, but not just any faith, for our text says: *that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

Notice that the opening verse of our text twice mentions the faith OF Jesus Christ. Thus, justifying faith has Jesus Christ as its SOURCE as well as its OBJECT. Think about it. Together with Paul and all the Christians of old, we Christians today *have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ.*

We believe in Jesus Christ because, as Acts 4:12 and John 3:16 informs us, “Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” However, our faith in Jesus Christ is NOT something we have produced in ourselves by our own works, for we read in Romans 10:17 and 1 Corinthians 12:3, “faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.” Hence, the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit of God, has gifted us with faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord.

Take it to heart that any faith that does NOT HAVE JESUS CHRIST as both its Source and Object is NOT faith that justifies, “For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.” (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 John 5:20)

Accordingly, Jesus Christ – true man and true God, but one Christ – is the OBJECT of JUSTIFYING FAITH as well as the SOURCE of JUSTIFYING FAITH. All praise, honor and glory be to our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Verses 17 & 18, ----- (Galatians 2:17-18)

The 17th and 18th verses of Galatians chapter two must be viewed together for proper understanding, and also the context must be considered. Prior to our Scripture selection the apostle Paul relates that there were at Jerusalem, “false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.” (Galatians 2:4)

So, false Christians who were Judaizers desired and required observances of all sorts of laws as if such works were necessary for salvation. Even the apostle Peter began to err, and Paul had to correct him, for we read in Galatians 2:11-14, “But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?” Hence, some were attempting to require certain works as being necessary for salvation in addition to the Gospel.

Consequently, Paul declares in our text: *But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.*

Accordingly, people cannot seek to be justified by Christ and yet teach that He has not paid for all sin but that we must also do certain works of our own to pay for sin. To teach our own works are necessary to pay for sins denies that we are declared righteous by God for Jesus’ sake, and therefore also teaches that Jesus Himself is the *minister of sin*, the servant of sin, since He did not actually completely pay for sin.

To build again the teaching that one’s own works are necessary for salvation makes one a *transgressor*, a sinner, for saying that Jesus Christ paid for the sins of the world. It’s all or nothing, folks. Either Jesus is the Savior who has paid for ALL the sins of ALL people, or He is not! HOLY SCRIPTURE ASSURES US THAT JESUS CHRIST HAS INDEED PAID FOR ALL THE SINS OF ALL PEOPLE, for we read in 2 Corinthians 5:19, “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.” Yes, it’s as 1 John 2:1-2 also reports, “if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous: And he is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world.” Thus, justification is indeed by God-given and sustained faith alone in Jesus Christ without the deeds of the law, “For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.” (Romans 8:3-4)

Verse 19, ----- (Galatians 2:19)

The apostle Paul as a Christian holding fast to Jesus in faith says: *I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.* Fellow Christians, each of us can make the same confession as did Paul, for the LAW of God convicts, condemns and kills us as it has shown us our sin and our need for the Savior; while the GOSPEL OF CHRIST, has shown us our true Savior and has been the means through which the Holy Spirit of Christ has gifted us with

faith in Jesus as our personal Savior and Lord. Thus, we are *dead to the law* as being a means to pay for sin and earn God's favor, because we already have God's favor since we are justified by God-given faith in Jesus Christ as our personal Savior and Lord. Now we are free to live unto God by being fruitful in the faith of Jesus Christ, not living in fear of punishment but living in gratefulness to God as we now use His Law as a guide to sanctified living. Yes, we *through the law* are *dead to the law, that we might live unto God*.

Verse 20, ----- (Galatians 2:20)

Think about the confession Paul made and how each of us Christians can say as he said: *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*

Realize that Christ took all of our sins and their punishment upon Himself, paying for all of our sins in full with His own holy and precious blood, for Hebrews 9:12 declares, "Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us." Thus, we have been crucified with Christ in that by faith in Him we share in the benefits of His redemptive work. It's as we read in Romans 6:4-11, "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: Knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto

sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Accordingly, Christ lives in us Christians as we live by the faith of Jesus Christ the Son of God who dwells in us and guides us and empowers us to be fruitful in the faith, bringing forth God-pleasing works in full accord with God's Word. It's as Jesus says to His followers in John 15:3-5, "Now ye are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you. Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing." Yes, fellow Christians, we cannot do what is right in God's sight without Jesus abiding in us and we abiding in Him by the faith His Holy Spirit has worked in our hearts. Christ empowers us to do what is right in God's sight. All glory be to Jesus our Lord and Savior!

My friends, JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE— faith which is OF Jesus Christ and IN Jesus Christ, such faith being God-given and God-sustained and fruitful by His power, for Ephesians 2:8-10 states in no uncertain terms, "by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them."

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As we ponder the remaining verse of our text, let us see why the doctrine of justification by faith alone must be upheld.

Verse 21, ----- (Galatians 2:21)

One big reason why the doctrine of justification by faith alone must be upheld is that it is clearly taught in God's Word – the Holy Bible – as we've seen from Scripture already, and Proverbs 30:5-6 plainly states, "Every word of God is pure: he is a

shield unto them that put their trust in him. Add thou not unto his words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar." Furthermore, to teach that one is justified entirely or even in the least part by the works of the Law is to set-aside, neutralize, or violate God's grace as shown to us in Christ Jesus, for the apostle Paul declares: *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.*

Indeed, to mix in man's works into the doctrine of justification frustrates God's grace, because to hold that any part of real righteousness that avails before God is a product of one's own works is to hold that Christ's death was unnecessary.

Think about the fact that many so-called Christian church-bodies actually teach works-righteousness and thereby deny that justification is by God-given faith alone in Jesus Christ. Some teach that certain acts of penance are actually necessary to earn forgiveness— acts such as saying the Lord's prayer a certain number of times and praying to mother Mary or other departed saints in accord with a silly set of beads. Others teach that folks must "make a decision for Christ and ask Him into their hearts" in order to be saved, as if spiritually-dead people have such an ability.

Oh beloved, Isaiah 64:7-8 clearly states, "there is none that calleth upon thy name, that stirreth up himself to take hold of thee: for thou hast hid thy face from us, and hast consumed us, because of our iniquities. But now, O LORD, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand." And, Titus 3:5-7 declares, "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life." And, we read in Ephesians 2:4-7, which is written to Christians, "But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with

Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus."

Therefore, let us with grateful hearts uphold the Biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone. Let us be ever grateful to our gracious God and Lord that JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE. Let us daily and sincerely repent of our sins. And, let us continue to cling to Christ Jesus in heart-deep faith as our personal Savior and Lord, *Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.* Amen.

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