

“Faith-Justification or Self-Justification?”—Galatians 2:18-20

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “Faith-Justification or Self-Justification?”, is Galatians 2:18-20 → *If I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is 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.* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

How much of the conversation which you engage is filled with self-justification? It’s amazing how much of the verbal communication which you use is a process of self-justification, an effort to explain your actions to others so that they are acceptable. It may be natural in light of the many decisions which you have to make in a given day. When making a purchase many people not only have a difficult time justifying their “spend” in their own minds but also how to justify it to others, such as your spouse. Somehow it needs to be acceptable in order to be “responsible” spending.

The efforts to justify our actions are endless. When you’ve been hurt or offended by someone how many conversations with other people are

necessary to justify and validate your feelings? Disagreements involve self-justification on many levels in an effort to think or do the “right” thing. Ever met someone who constantly “second guesses” your actions whenever you’re around him? The feelings of self-justification are immense, whether spoken or thought! It constantly feels like “judgment day” in his presence. Self-justification is even involved in decisions of service to the Lord Jesus and others.

The struggle with self-justification is that it will not leave you with a sense of peace, especially in light of your sin. Since everything you do in life is tainted by sin in some way, self-justification will leave you lacking for peace of mind and confidence. This is why it is dangerous to interpret your relationship with Jesus and others on the basis of your own self-justification. It will create the struggle to which Paul refers in our text as he wrote to the Christians in the region of Galatia—defining their actions in light of God’s Law, which led to nullifying the work of Christ’s justification for them. In fact, it is the nature of sin to get defensive in self-justification rather than become submissive in faith-justification.

With the influence of some false teachers, satan got a foothold in the lives of many Galatian Christians, leading them to believe that their salvation was based upon **both** faith in Christ and following God’s Laws. Wait a minute.

Aren't we supposed to follow God's Laws? Jesus Himself said in Luke 11:28

→ *Blessed . . . are those who hear the word of God **and keep it!*** What's wrong with obeying God's Laws? Nothing.

The struggle is with our sinful nature as it encounters God's Law. You know how it works. Someone tells you to do something and your inclination is to think or say, "Do it yourself! Who are you to tell me what to do?" The law (i.e. the command) works as a catalyst with your sinful nature to produce rebellion and death in the relationship. Thus, something has to take place to restore a proper relationship and unfortunately your sinful nature relies on self-justification to do so. All it can do is try to justify your sin in hopes that the other person will accept your rebellion. What is intended to lead to a living relationship actually then brings death to the relationship.

Notice Paul says in verse 19 of our text: *For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.* When God's Law shows you your sin it's purpose is to bring forth life in you through death. Sound strange? Of course it does from a self-justification perspective. But from a faith-justification perspective it is clear. Galatians 3:13-14 says: *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law* (i.e. that condemnation we receive because of our rebelling against God's Law) *by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"—so that in Christ Jesus . . . we might*

*receive the promised Spirit **through faith**.*

When you are made aware of your sin by rebelling against God's Law the Holy Spirit convicts you, bringing you to see your need for the death of Jesus **for you**. He is leading you in faith to admit your sin, confess it to Jesus and trust in Him for complete forgiveness. The Spirit then gives the desire to live differently where you receive God's Law with joy and not react by rebellion. This is how *through the law you die to the law, so that you might live to God!* Such faith-justification in the Person & Work of Jesus gives you a whole new perspective and desire toward God's Law!

As we continue to grow in our relationship to the LORD through faith in Jesus Christ, with the desire to obey God's Law, it is easy to fall into the trap of defining our relationship with the LORD on the basis of Law and even nullify the work of Jesus for us. This is what Paul refers to in verse 18 of our text when he says: *If I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor*. It is like "rebuilding" your new life in Jesus upon what was "tore down" by Jesus—the curse of the law—by depending upon your obedience to the law to define your salvation. You know how difficult it is to take on new behaviors because it's too easy to fall back into the old behaviors. Obedience to God's Law must be governed by **justification by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone, not self-justification**.

When you place your faith **completely** in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ **for you** then you will see the futility of your self-justification which is based upon failure to keep the Law and be freed by the Spirit's power to serve the LORD! Faith-justification is seeing God's Law through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Verse 20 of our text says: *I have been crucified with Christ. It is 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.* You confess that **there is no excuse or justification for your sin expect that found in the punishment of your sin which Jesus bore on the cross for you!**

In this new life of faith in Jesus by the Spirit the law is not our motivator. In fact, the law is never a good motivator for obedience. For instance, whenever children engage in those unique expressions of "affection" with words and fists, parents strive to make them reconcile by saying, "Say you're sorry!" After a reluctant "I'm sorry" the parent may tell them to "Say it like you mean it!" They will say "I'm sorry" in a more favorable tone. The law produced a different behavior but not obedience. Obedience is produced by the Gospel of God's love and forgiveness for you as the Holy Spirit works faith in Christ in your heart!

Paul says in Galatians 5:25 → *If we live by the Spirit, let us also keep in*

*step with the Spirit.* It is the Holy Spirit Who brings us into this faith-justification in Jesus Christ through baptism. (cf. Galatians 3:26-27; 1 Corinthians 12:13) It is the Holy Spirit Who empowers us to go forward with confidence and strive to live obediently even though we cannot keep God's Laws perfectly. The burden of sin and its punishment is taken off of you and placed upon Jesus. The burden of obedience to God's Law is taken off of you and placed upon the Holy Spirit working obedience in and through you. The burden of failure is taken off of you and placed upon Jesus' forgiveness when you fail as the Holy Spirit leads you to Him in repentance and faith again. This is why Paul says to *keep in step with the Spirit*, not keep in step with the Law.

Our whole life must be defined on the basis of faith-justification—a faith which clings completely to the Person and Work of Christ for us and through us! Thus, as verse 20 of our text says, *It is no longer I who live, but Christ Who lives in me.* We surrender to the work of Christ for us so that we may live to obey the LORD from faith, not live in the futile darkness of self-justification! You simply be who you are in Christ each day as the Holy Spirit does His work! And in faith-justification you will also be empowered by the Holy Spirit to see when you are falling into self-justification so that you will simply admit your sin, repent and go forth forgiven and renewed as Christ lives in you! Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding,  
keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.

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