

Justification

On February 14, 19 year old Nikolas Cruz walked into Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and set off the fire alarm. The students of the high school did as they had been taught to do, they filed out of the classrooms as quick as they could, making them easy targets for Cruz as he began firing on them with his AR-15. At the end of his rampage, 17 would be dead with another 19 injured.

At 4:11 Nickolas Cruz was taken into custody. The next day, he stood before a judge and was charged with 17 counts of premeditated murder.

There is no question that the death penalty will be sought, and if in the course of due process Cruz is found guilty, he probably will get the death sentence. Cruz is in a predicament that he cannot escape. He did the crime, and justice will be served.

Now, let your mind kind of wander a little. What if, in the end, Cruz were to stand before the judge, and Cruz were to apologize, admit his wrong, and ask for forgiveness. What if the judge says something like this, "Cruz, you did indeed do what you were charged. But I am going to forgive you of the 17 counts of murder. In fact, I am going to not only forgive you, but I am going to wipe these crimes off of your record. You are free to go. How absurd is that? Where is the justice? Well, let's take it to that extreme. Payback for the crime is to be given for justice to be complete. But how could Cruz do his part in the demand for justice?

There is a divine courtroom in which a similar scenario takes place. The judge is God the Father. The accused is us. Each of us stand guilty of sin. We may not have nor will we ever gun down 17 innocent people, but our sin stands against us before this divine judge. This presents a universal need of mankind. We have an universal need to be made right before a holy and righteous God.

That is the teaching of the passage I want us to look at this morning. It is the passage of your Sunday School lesson this morning. However, I want to begin with verse 15.

15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;

16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

17 But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!

18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.

20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

The Need for Justification

Justification is the central to the message to the Galatians. Justification is central to the gospel preached by Paul. Justification is central to Christianity itself.

Justification is the need to be made right before God. We are born with a sin problem. As we come to the place where we know right from wrong, we begin experiencing that all is not right with our spirit. We don't know what it is. We soon realize that we need to appease a supreme being of some kind. We have the need to be made right spiritually.

The Need for Justification is Universal.

These verses follow Paul's retelling of his confrontation with Peter because of the hypocrisy that Peter, Barnabas, and others committed in Antioch. If you notice in most of your Bibles, these verses are in quotation marks. Paul is recounting the conversation Paul had with Peter in his rebuke to Peter. The retold statement of Paul begins in verse 14. These are the words Paul spoke to Peter, and now he is speaking to the Galatian Christ followers. It is one of the classic passages on being justified by faith in Christ and Christ alone.

What we learn from these verses is that the need for justification is universal. Let me show you what I mean. We need to understand that verse 15 is written in a manner of the racial mindset that existed among the Jewish people. As far as they were concerned, there were only two kinds of people. There were the Jews who were "right" before God because they had the Law. They "abided" by the Law. So, they were God's people. The other kind of people were everyone else. They were Gentile sinners. After verse 15, Paul begins to show the fallacy of that mindset.

Take careful note of verse 16. There seems to be a monotonous repetition that is taking place with the word justified, or justification, but the repetition builds emphasis on the need for justification.

First the statement is general. *"Nevertheless, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus,"*

No one is in mind. Paul is simply stating a Biblical teaching that applies to all.

The second statement is personal. "Even we believed." Who believed? We go back to verse 15 for the answer, we Jews who had the Law, even we believed. There is an emphasis on the "we."

Even we believed so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law.

The third statement is universal.

since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

By stating no flesh, Paul means no one of the human race. This room has people who are different. We come from different religious upbringing. Some grew up in other world religions. Some grew up in other Christian denominations: Baptist, Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Catholics. We have different educational backgrounds. We have people from different parts of the nation. We have people of different socio-economic status. There is one thing we all have in common that we also have in common with all human race throughout the world. We need to be made right with God.

The Need for Justification is Met.

But the question is, "How are we to be justified? How are we to be made right with God?"

One of two paths are taken.

The first is being justified by works of the Law. What is this? If you ask a person, "If you were to die today, do you know for certain that you will go to heaven, or is that something you are still working

on?" I would say most Americans would say yes to that question. If you follow that question with another one, "Suppose you were to die today and you stand before God. He ask you, 'Why should I let you into my heaven?' what would you tell Him?"

I've had all kind of responses to that. How would you answer the question? Many times I would get this, "I've been a good person. I've not sin the big sins. I help people." Those are works answer. You are trying to be justified before God by works of the Law. Many who call themselves Christians who are members of churches give this as the answer of why God should let them in heaven. It is a works answer. You are trying to be justified by keeping the Law. No, we don't try to keep the ceremonial law. However, we do try to keep the moral law.

Thou shalt have no other gods before me....

Listen again to what Paul says about that. By the works of the Law, no flesh shall be justified! Even if for some very rare occasion, we are able to keep all the law, we are still guilty because we have the sin nature. We are sinners by action. We are also sinners by nature.

The only other option for justification is to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ. This is what Paul is saying. "Peter, though we are different from the Gentile "sinners" racially, we are still the same spiritually. *Even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law.*

Romans 5:9 - We have now been justified by His blood.

Romans 3:24 – We are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

Romand 3:28 – We hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law.

It is not so much that God makes us right before Him. God declares us to be right with Him. We are guilty. However, we are declared righteous as we place trust in what Jesus has done. What has Jesus done? He has taken the penalty of our sin upon Himself.

Let's go back to the Cruz illustration. What if Cruz were to say to the judge, "I am sorry. Please forgive me." The judge says, "You are guilty. However, I declare you right before the state. Your crimes are forgiven and your record is wiped clean." The families of the 17 rightfully cry out, "Who is to pay for the crime so that justice is served?" What if the defense lawyer says, "I will take the death penalty for Nikolas Cruz." Absurd right? That is exactly what Jesus had done for us. He took the payment for our sin upon Himself.

There is one difference between the lawyer in our scenario with Nickolas Cruz and our Advocate, Jesus Christ. Our Advocate, Jesus Christ not only died for our sins, but was raised from the dead to give us eternal life. By our trust in what Jesus has done, God the Father declares us right before God. That is the only way. This is the only way.

God is urging you to make that trust today.

The Need for Justification Met, leads to new way of life

What if we already have our needs met? How then are we to live? Many think they have to continue to do the works of the Law to stay saved. Listen to me. Once we have been declared righteous before God, nothing will change that position. Your Sunday School book tells you that not only are we declared right before God, He brings us into His family. At the same time, when we are declared right before God, He changes our disposition, our character, our way in which we live. He changes our ego.

The Lord who saved you is now the Lord who lives through you.

Galatians 2:20 – I have been crucified with Christ. It is not only a onetime thing when you trusted Jesus. You continue to be crucified with Christ to the old sinful nature.

Nevertheless I live.

The Life I now live, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself up for me.

Your ego has a new Lord. Your ego has a new life.

How can I live this new life of being declared right by God in Christ Jesus. 1 John 3:9 answers that question. We haven't gotten to that yet in our Wednesday night Bible study and prayer time.

⁹No one who is ^[d]born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is ^[e]born of God.

The seed of the Father is the character of his offspring. The character of God the Father is in us. What or better, who is that seed? It is the Holy Spirit. Holy Spirit in you empowers you to live Galatians 2:20.

Being justified in Christ changes you position. Being justified also changes your disposition, for now you are children of God because the seed of God the Father is in you.

No one who practices sin, habitually, willfully, and deliberately is born of God. Based on the authority of scripture, he cannot say he is born of God.

So I ask you, which method are you using to be right before God? Works, or Faith. If you have been declared right before God, are you allowing Christ to live through you?