

Grace, mercy, and peace too you from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love. Amen.

The word of God for this morning is found in Galatians 2:16-21.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. 17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me. 21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”

So far our text. Dear fellow redeemed.

‘Reform’ according to the dictionary is to restore or renew. Interestingly the word that is most commonly translated in Scripture as ‘repent’ has the idea of changing one’s mind. In our yearly look at what came to be known as the Reformation we can see then how applicable the word really is to the situation that took place.

But was it really that unique? In the end, it really wasn’t. Ever since the fall into sin mankind has been battling the basic issue of the Reformation; the desire to justify oneself before God by what you do vs. what God has done for you in Christ.

The reason for this is that until the Lord changes us and takes us home to heaven we will continue to have the old Adam with us. And because of this continual struggle, the Lord reminds us in His word that, **“You are justified by faith in Christ.”**

The Apostle Paul was dealing with a very unfortunate situation in Galatia. People had crept into the congregation who taught that a person must be circumcised and keep the entire law before they are saved.

Not only were their people in the congregation teaching this it went one step further by having one of the Apostles becoming weak and supporting the position.

Unfortunately the Apostle Peter did become weak and began to disassociate himself with the Gentiles. In turn, this hypocrisy caused other Jews to do the same which would’ve forced the Gentiles to wonder whether or not they truly needed to become circumcised to be saved.

Who else would be more intimately familiar with how miserable it is to be under the law than a Jew.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

Remembering the history of the Jews and the influence that the Pharisees had on the people is important for us to understand our text. The Pharisees taught the people that you needed to do all things found in the Law perfectly, including all the extra laws made up by the Pharisees. It is what Jesus spoke of when He said, Luke 11:46 **“Woe to you also, lawyers! For you load men with burdens hard to bear, and you yourselves do not touch the burdens with one of your fingers.”**

So when Paul said **“knowing that”** he was referring to the fact that through the experience of failure no one can be justified by what he does. Instead, **“You are justified by faith in Christ.”**

It wasn't only the Jews who heaped onto themselves the burden of the law. The Sixth Session of the Council of Trent: Canon XII. declares that *“If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified; let him be anathema.”*

What else is there to do with such a statement than to understand that YOU must do something? But any 'good' Catholic will tell you the same thing as Paul, 'I can't do it.'

So Paul says that **“...even we have believed in Christ Jesus.”** That is to say, both Jews and Gentiles have believed in Jesus. We as Gentiles didn't have the burden of the Pharisaical law laid upon us. We didn't have the Levitical Law laid upon us. But we still know the weight of the Law in the Commandments and what a burden they are unto themselves.

So we look to **“...be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”**

But don't our own lives reflect what happened in Galatia and what happened in the visible church during Luther's time? We have this desire to want to justify ourselves before Christ, outside of Christ. This is the Lord's response to this desire from our text, **“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 “For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”**

In other words: If we confess that we are declared righteous in Christ yet desire to work our way to heaven, aren't we really back under the Law because of what we are doing? Do we claim that Christ desires us to believe and act this way? May it never be!

Christ tore down the building of the Law when in Himself He fulfilled all things, Mat. 5:17 **“Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill.”**

Everything in the Law and the Prophets that was required of the Lamb of God was fulfilled in Jesus Christ the Son of God. In His perfect life He mirrored every failure that we will ever commit. If you commit a sin, remind yourself that Jesus, for your sake never once sinned that way.

The death you could never offer to God because of your inherit sin was willingly carried out by the Son of Man that Good Friday.

But when we begin to rebuild the building of works we make ourselves a transgressor because we are no longer under grace. We place ourselves under the bondage of the Law which if we try to justify ourselves with it can only crush and condemn us.

And if we in our weakness place ourselves back under the Law remember what happened to Paul. **"For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 "I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me."**

What an amazing thing to hear! I, you, have been crucified with Christ. So perfectly is Christ's righteousness declared to us that our heavenly Father looks at you as though you died on the cross for your own sins. Not only died but was able to offer satisfactory payment for them. What an amazing mystery!

So then if that is what God the Father sees us as we can understand what Paul was saying, **"...it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."** Because of Jesus that old sinful man in the eyes of the Father is gone! He is dead! Halleluiah! I am no longer burdened by the Law to the extent that I need to fulfill it to be declared righteous before God. Jesus did it and has given His righteousness to you! **"You are justified by faith in Christ."**

And be strong to the end. Paul said, **"I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."**

It was imperative that Paul be strong in the defense of the Gospel. If he would've given into the teachings of the Jews and started to follow the example of Peter, the congregation in Galatia would've met a quicker end than it did.

It was imperative that people such as Luther not set aside the grace of God and submit to the Pharisaical laws of Popes and Councils.

It is just as imperative for us to be strong and not set aside the grace of God. For without that free gift of sins forgiven in Jesus Christ, we would still be in our sins before the Father. We would be trying to work our way to heaven.

Because of our nature we will have a tendency to do that very thing. And that is when it's time to have our own personal reformation. Be renewed and have a change of mind through the word of God and be reminded that Christ did not die in vain. And in faith believe that, **"You are justified by faith in Christ."** Amen.