

Justification: Christ alone by Faith alone

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[0 : 0 0] Verse 15, following. Failure to see the implications of certain beliefs that we might have or actions that we might take often betrays the fact that we didn't really understand in the first place what we believed or what we were doing.

And it's often only when the implications unfold before us that we can see the flaw at the heart of our thinking or at the heart of our strategy.

Yesterday afternoon I know many of you were watching the Wales Island rugby match. I think we got more Irish here than Welsh so perhaps it was a sorry point. It was a sorry point for the Scots as well.

But if you're watching that game this afternoon you'll see that if you have any interest in understanding of rugby that Ronan O'Gara, who's the Irish fly half, was leading his whole backline in a particular strategy coming up very fast on the Welsh back row and on the Welsh kickers in an effort to try and charge down kicks.

But it proved to be folly for two reasons. One, because O'Gara was coming up so fast himself he was leaving a gap in the Irish backline through which the Welsh stormed through and scored tries.

[1 : 2 0] And secondly, because he was coming up so quickly that the referee on several occasions thought he was offside and therefore gave a penalty against him. And in the end O'Gara got so flustered and cross he lost the head and he had to be taken off and substituted.

And failure to up-grasp the implications of that game plan that the Irish had cost them the match. That's just the truth of the matter. I don't have a TV, I was watching it yesterday and my in-law's house, my mother-in-law, was very upset because Ronan O'Gara is her pin-up boy.

But that's the truth. He'd got the strategy wrong and it was only when the implications began to unfold that it was clear that it was a very bad strategy in itself.

Last week we saw in looking at this letter to Galatians how it was a failure to grasp the magnitude of the implications of the gospel that was at the root of the issue in Galatia.

Just as it had been at the root of the issue in the churches elsewhere, in Jerusalem and in Antioch. Chapter 2, verse 14. The problem was conduct out of step with the truth of the gospel.

[2 : 3 3] Conduct out of step with the truth of the gospel. And that was what was in danger of destroying the whole mission of the church and the mission of the kingdom. And that's very often the same problem today.

It's only when we live in line with the implications of the gospel, that is, as we said, when we live by the gospel and for the gospel, that we can advance the gospel and preserve the church.

And that's not always an obvious or an easy thing. It might seem obvious, but that's the whole point. It wasn't. Even Peter, even Barnabas, even that extraordinary missionary church at Antioch, the greatest missionary church the world has ever seen.

Even they were all led astray. They were knocked off their stride, so they were walking squint. By fear, by threats, by sin.

We summed all these up as the pressures of cultural protectionism. Wanting to protect earthly things, worldly interests, worldly traditions and friendships.

[3 : 40] Whatever they may be, however good and right they seem to be in themselves. Putting things of this evil age above things of the new age, the new creation in Christ.

Things of the flesh above things of the spirit. Always knocks you off your stride. And leads to disaster.

No. Even if you find yourself isolated and against apparently the whole world, as Paul seemed to be at Antioch, you must stand firm for the truth of the gospel.

No matter what the cost. And that's what we've seen Paul doing in this chapter so far. Now that he's defended his authenticity as an apostle and his authority to the Galatian church, he goes on to begin to apply the dispute that happened at Antioch and the fallout from it, to apply it directly to the situation in the church in Galatia that he's really concerned with now.

Because the issues there are exactly the same. New missionaries had come to them and told them that what they really needed to become full and proper New Testament believers with the full experience of all that could be theirs, well they needed to become fully Jewish too.

[5 : 01] And now we're getting to the heart of this letter here. We're beginning to see exactly what is at stake here. Whether this verse 15 carries on a direct quote to what Paul said to Peter, if you've got an NIV you'll see it's all carrying on as though Paul's speaking this still directly to Peter, or whether, as in my Bible and perhaps in yours, the quote ends at the end of verse 14, that doesn't really matter.

Paul is certainly saying that what applies there applies directly to the Galatian church. And this section here is called by Leon Morris, the hinge and central affirmation of the letter.

Perhaps even better, Richard Longenecker calls it the central propositional statement. In other words, the rest of Paul's argument that goes on from here expands and unpacks what he has densely here just in these few verses.

So he's beginning by saying, look, this is what we agree on. Verses 15 and 16. But here's my understanding of the implications of this.

Verses 17 onwards. And here's yours. And there's a great gulf between them. Verses 15 and 16 gives us a point of agreement. We all agree, he says, that justification is by Christ alone, not by works of the law.

[6 : 27] It comes by belief in Christ. Verse 16. Once and for all, we have believed in Christ Jesus. And it comes by the work of Christ for us.

It comes by the faith or the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. And the point is that this is not an issue between them.

Everybody's agreed on this. Peter and Paul and the Judaizers and the Galatian believers. At least as far as beginning the Christian life is concerned, they're all agreed.

It's grace, not works of any kind at all. Look at down to chapter 3, verse 3. Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the Spirit?

You see, they're all agreed on how it begins. But, the second paragraph here, verses 17 to 20 in particular, Paul presents the area that they're not agreed on, the implications of justification.

[7 : 30] And it's the massive implications of all this that has been misunderstood by the Galatians, just as it had been by Peter and by the others in Antioch. They just simply hadn't grasped the massive, the monumental change that has taken place with the dawn of the new age in Jesus Christ.

They haven't begun to understand the huge shift that's taken place because of the coming of Christ in history and the completion of the work that had always been promised.

It simply changes everything. That's what Paul's saying. And in particular, in two respects. It changes everything for the people of God, that is, for their corporate life together.

In other words, it has huge implications for the church, for ecclesiology. That's a fancy word. But secondly, it also has huge implications for your personal life, for the personal life of individual believers, not just for the church together, but for the Christian.

It has implications for our sanctification. That's the fancy word for that. And it's very, very important for us to grasp that the burden of the letters of the Galatians is that it addresses these two areas, the church and their life together, and the Christian and their life with Jesus Christ.

[8 : 55] It's all about how life goes on, not just how it begins, but how it goes on in the new age of the gospel. Now that Christ has come, now that his work of justification that was long promised through the prophets, and now that it's happened, now that it's been accomplished in history, how does the life of the church and the life of the believer go on?

First, Paul says, justification unites every believer in Christ, whether you're a Jew or a Gentile or a male or a female or a slave or a free person. It unites every believer in Christ, therefore, justification insists on an inseparable relationship with one another, regardless of age or status or creed or colour or anything else.

In other words, fellowship in the church is based upon Christ alone, not anything else. Not Christ and being a proper Jew or and doing this or and doing that or anything else as the false teachers were claiming.

In their case, you have to become a proper Jew. In other words, our church life together, our ecclesiology, must be in step with the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's what Paul goes on to argue. But secondly, likewise, justification unites every individual believer with Christ. And because Christ has come, his spirit is in us.

[10 : 30] Chapter 4, verse 4. Christ has come in history. Chapter 4, verse 6, he sent the spirit of his son into our hearts. His life now is in our bodies. That's verse 20 of our little passage here.

The life I now live, I live by the faith of the son of God. And therefore, justification also insists on an inseparable relationship with the Holy Spirit.

In other words, we're not free having been justified and forgiven for the past to just go on and sin and do what we like. That could never be. The false teachers, you see, were saying, oh, Paul's doctrine is so dangerous because if it's just by Christ and faith alone, not by what you do, oh, you can do what you like.

Paul says, no, no, no. Justification insists on an inseparable union with Christ himself. And therefore, you're free not to sin, but chapter 1, verse 14, to be a slave of Christ, as Paul was.

That's sanctification, that's holiness. We have a personal life in step with the spirit of Christ. That's why Paul says in chapter 5, walk in step with the Holy Spirit.

[11 : 47] So these two things are the huge implications of justification for the church, walking in step with the gospel, and for the individual believer, walking in step always, inseparably, with the spirit of the Holy Jesus Christ.

And so in these verses that we're looking at, Paul moves from a discussion of Christ's work for us. Do you remember chapter 1, verse 4? He gave himself for our sins, that's justification. He moves on to talking about Christ's ongoing work in us.

He's delivered us from this evil age into the age of new creation. And he wants to talk about what that means for the church, the corporate life of fellowship, united by Christ together in one new creation, not divided by things of this evil age.

He wants to talk about what it means for the Christian, personal lives of holiness that are animated by the life of the new creation, the spirit of Christ in us, not by the things of the old age, the flesh.

And essentially the first of these two things, the implications for the church, is worked out by Paul theologically in chapter 3 and 4. End of chapter 3, we're all one in Christ Jesus.

[13 : 04] End of chapter 4, we're all children of promise, children of the free woman. And the second of these, the practical implications, if you like, the existential implications, what it means for me in my own personal Christian life, well that's expanded in chapter 5 and chapter 6, which is all about walking by the spirit and not by the flesh.

It's all about how we've become now, we're in the spirit, we're in Christ, we're in the new creation. So I think we have to recognise that the burden, the real heart of Galatians, is not so much a defence of justification by faith, per se, on its own.

It's rather a robust defence of what that actually means in the Christian life, in the ongoing life of the church and the Christian. And that means it's got something very vital and important to say to every one of us who's here, whether we're a Christian or not.

Because if it's all about how we go on in our Christian life and in our church life, then it's vital for us, isn't it? Not just about beginning. And yet, Paul does deal with justification by faith alone as the beginning of the Christian life and we're going to see that tonight, we're going to focus on that tonight.

But the main focus is that he goes on to hammer home what that means for the rest of life beyond the beginning. That's why in chapter 3, verse 3, he's so concerned with, are you now being perfected in the flesh?

[14 : 40] I'm interested in your Christian life and experience now, not just when it began, but now and in the future. And that's the critical issue in Galatians and that is the critical issue today for churches, for Christians.

It's all very well to say, isn't it? Yes, we believe that the gospel is about grace alone and faith alone. That's how we believed, that's how we became Christians. But the critical question is, are you walking in step with the implications of that?

Are we living like that in the corporate life we have together as a church? Is the gospel dictating our pace? Or actually, in real life, are we denying the gospel by our behaviour, by our priorities, by a whole host of things which actually have more to do with this age, the flesh, the concerns of the world around us, and a worldly way of doing things, not the age to come?

Are we really walking in step with the gospel of Christ, in step with the Spirit, in our personal lives? Or, in fact, are we burdening ourselves with yokes of slavery, with heavy burdens upon us, trying to make our own way, having begun with Christ, but going on ourselves?

There's all kinds of practical ways that we can ask that question and expose the truth about ourselves. Many of us have got families and children, some of them young children.

[16 : 13] Are we walking in the truth of the gospel in the way that we bring up our children? Are we really committing them to God's grace, by faith, and claiming his promises of grace by faith?

Or are we actually living in fear? Fear of what might happen to our children? Desperately wondering what we can do to stop them going astray, how we can put this in place, or that in place, or the next thing, to keep them.

Not trusting in the grace of God, trusting in his grace and gospel. Think about that in a hundred other ways in your own experience.

It's so important to get a grip of what the implications of justification are that Paul has written this whole letter. We're going to spend, I think, probably three evenings just on this passage, just to make sure that we really grapple with it properly ourselves.

Next couple of times we look at it, we're going to look at these two things in turn, the implications of justification for the church, that is the corporate, the social implications of this doctrine, and then after that the implications for the Christian, for our own personal spiritual lives.

[17 : 30] But tonight I want to focus just on these first two verses, verses 15 and 16, to explore this central doctrine that Paul says everyone has agreed on. So important for him to explore it and establish that before he can begin to prosecute the implications.

So I want to stand back tonight a little bit from the letter of Galatians, just focus on these two verses, and in particular on this doctrine, the doctrine of justification by faith alone.

It's going to be a little bit more of a doctrinal study I suppose, but I do think it's important because there's a lot of confusion about this. So let's get then to verses 15 and 16, the very heart of the gospel of grace, justification by faith alone.

Everything else, says Paul, flows out of this, so we better understand it. Salvation is all by God's grace. None of it is by our own efforts, by our own deserving.

It's only mediated faith by faith and through Jesus Christ. Unless we understand that, unless we establish that as the bedrock of our faith, well, we're never going to get all the implications of it.

[18 : 43] So Paul begins, look, we're in agreement on this. You and I know this, Peter. Else we wouldn't be believers. We certainly couldn't both be apostles, preaching the gospel. We didn't agree on this.

It's the heart of the gospel. We're all agreed on this. Man's greatest predicament is that God is holy and righteous and pure, and he demands that we should be too.

But we are tainted. We are sinners. We are unrighteous. So we can't be right with God, and that is the universal condition of all men and women. They are guilty.

They are separated from God. They are under condemnation. The Bible is very clear about that from start to finish. Romans 3.19, The whole world is held accountable to God and found guilty.

Romans 3.23, All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. So we're helpless in our guilt. That's the testimony of Scripture. We all face condemnation.

[19 : 47] We've been declared to be guilty, to be condemned at the bar of God's justice. That's true whether we feel that or not. The prisoner may be at the bar in the dock.

He is pronounced guilty by the judge. The verdict of the jury has come in. He is pronounced guilty. He may be as defiant as he was on the first day of the trial. He may not believe himself to be guilty for a minute.

All that is utterly irrelevant. What is relevant is the declaration of the verdict of the court. You may be sitting exams.

You may have felt you've done perfectly alright in that exam. You did really well. I remember being at university with a guy who used to come out every time and tell us how brilliantly he'd done in his exam. I have to say we quite enjoyed it when the results came out and it wasn't always as he had thought.

But what he thought didn't matter. What mattered was the declaration of the person who was marking his paper. And that is the declaration of God upon all humanity.

[20 : 52] and therefore man's greatest need is justification. That is the opposite of a declaration of condemnation. It's a declaration of acquittal.

Of innocence in the eyes of the court. Of vindication. Same word is translated as that exactly in 1 Timothy 3.16 about Jesus.

He was vindicated. That's humanity's greatest need so that we can be accepted by God and not rejected and punished. So the big question then is well how can a person be justified?

How can a sinful person be declared righteous? Vindicated? Acceptable to God? Well in verses 15 and 16 here Paul sets forth two alternative possibilities.

One is by works of law and the other is by faith or the faithfulness of Jesus Christ or faith in Christ. It doesn't really make much difference to the argument here whether you take that one way or the other.

[22 : 02] But either way it's a stark contrast. Works of law or Christ. And these are mutually exclusive. There's no other way. So the first way then is by works of law.

Let's say it's the way of religion. Two ways of being justified potentially before God. The way of religion. The way religion thinks. And the way of Christ.

So first then by works of the law. In this case he's referring to keeping the Jewish law. Perhaps especially referring to circumcision and food laws and ceremonies and so on.

But really I think referring to the whole gamut of the Mosaic law. The way of faith. The way of keeping God's commands. Nothing wrong with God's commands.

Indeed we are to keep God's commands. Paul is very clear that he and all Jews and all Jewish Christians know that that's not how you become justified before God.

[23 : 03] We need to take just a minute to think about what the law was about and how it did function. It's quite true to say that the Old Testament never ever did anywhere teach justification by works of the law.

Paul's not arguing here against the Old Testament. God chose Israel by grace. By his covenant with Abraham and then with Israel. He redeemed his people out of Egypt.

And it was to an already redeemed people that on Sinai he gave his commandments, his instructions for living. The law that was given through Moses had a number of different functions.

They're not different necessarily laws that you can separate out into different parts but there are different functions of God's law. One was a social and ethnic function.

It was to separate out a people for himself, a people that were distinct and holy and set apart. And things like the food laws and circumcision and so on were clearly boundary markers that separated out Jews from others.

[24 : 06] But of course the law had many moral functions too. Showing people how they ought to be. They ought to be holy as I am holy says the Lord. But Paul in Galatians here says that really in terms of salvation that was mainly a negative function.

Paul says in chapter 3 verse 19 the law was added because of transgressions. In other words it was to expose, to highlight people's sins, to highlight how unlike God they really were.

How unholy. To show them how much in need of God's mercy they really were. Thirdly the law had many, I suppose you could call them ceremonial or Celtic functions.

Sacrifices and rituals that were provided especially to atone for sin. To atone for law breaking when God's people broke the law and knew that they weren't what they should be.

And all of these sacrifices as the book of Hebrews tells us were shadows that pointed forward to the one great sacrifice in Christ who was to come. But in all these ways together as Paul says in chapter 3 verse 24 the law was given to lead us to Christ.

[25 : 20] The us he's talking about there is the Jews, the people of Israel, the Old Testament people of God. In other words the whole law, the whole message of Moses was there to say you need a saviour. He's coming.

Trust in him. How does it do that? Well, does it negatively by exposing sin. Exposing guilt. Acting like a tutor Paul says to rebuke, to punish, to show how lacking in righteousness you are.

But secondly at the same time positively to lead us to Christ. For God's people to look beyond the law itself. To look for someone that would save from the predicament that the law condemns them to.

And in that sense Paul says, well, of course the law was only temporary. It was pointing forward to the reality of Christ. Well, when the reality comes, the law finishes its job.

It's like a trailer of a film. It's just to whet the appetite to point to the thing itself. So it's quite true that the Old Testament never anywhere taught that you could be justified by the works of the law.

[26 : 28] As though by trying to keep every command and regulation somehow that would impress God. Never taught that. But the reality is that human beings being what they are, being essentially sinful, essentially proud, essentially rebellious against God, well, we want to believe that we can save ourselves and justify ourselves.

We want, deep down in our hearts, to say, well, really, I'm a pretty decent sort of guy. God should cut me some slack. I'm doing a good job. Surely he'll accept me. That was true of the Israelites in the Old Testament, just as it's true of all people everywhere.

It has been before and has been ever since. There's a basic legalistic tendency deep in the human heart. It's just part of our fallen nature.

It says, we are God's too. We're in charge. We don't want to be forced to admit. We have to accept something from outside ourselves.

We want to do it ourselves. I mean, we see this so clearly, don't we, even from a very early age in our children. You know what it's like when they're trying to do something, they just can't do it. You say, look, I'll help you.

[27 : 40] No, I want to do it myself. You see that? But we're all like that, aren't we? See it in adults. Proud people refusing to accept charity.

I don't want your charity. So many ways. We say to God, I don't want your charity. I want to justify myself.

And it is true, simple fact, that many Jews tried to seek acceptance with God by works of the law. And they, in doing that, changed the law completely from what it was supposed to be, a response of gratitude and obedience to the God who loved them.

They changed it into a religion of legalism. Paul's quite clear in that. Romans chapter 9, verse 32. They pursue it not by faith, but as if it were by works.

Which it wasn't at all, but that's what they made it. Now some scholars today are looking at Paul's arguments and saying, well, Paul's wrong.

[28 : 48] Jews of that day always held to the truth that you entered God's covenant by grace and not by works. They always understood that it was just in response to God's grace that you kept the law.

There wasn't any legalism at all. But that simply just doesn't fit the facts of history. It doesn't fit the facts of what we're dealing with in Scripture.

Paul himself described himself in that regard. For many proud Jews it was all too easy to be led into legalism. Certainly it's true that there were true believing Jews in the Old Testament time and when the Lord Jesus Christ came.

just need to read Psalm 119 to see that there's the psalmist extolling the law of God as a beautiful, wonderful thing, not as a burden he's trying to keep, but as a joy of his expression of the life of God within him.

And that's right, of course. Many others perverted it. The law itself, you see, was good, but sin in proud human hearts seized it and made it into a terrible enslaving instrument of condemnation.

[30 : 04] The Jews, by slavish obedience to the law and all the additions to the law, the minutiae of the Pharisees and all of these things, they were seeking to establish their own righteousness.

At least that's what Paul says in Romans 10 verse 3. Or at least, at the very least, they were seeking to remain faithful Jews by doing everything that the law required.

And they, therefore, perverted, they misunderstood the true nature of what God had revealed through Moses and the prophets. They turned it into a religion of works.

John Stott comments that that has been the religion of ordinary man before and since. And we know that to be true, don't we? That is the religion of the man in the street today, isn't it?

I'm alright. I do a good job. I'm kind to animals. God will accept me. There's many folk in Christian churches who think like that.

[31 : 09] It would be true of the Church of Scotland today that in 300 years' time, if you look back at it and said, what did people in the Church of Scotland believe at the beginning of the 21st century? People would open the official documents.

They'd take the Westminster Confession of Faith and the chapter on justification by God's free grace alone, faith being his alone instrument of justification. They'd say, oh, they all believed in the Gospel of free grace.

Is that true? Well, not in the pews in many churches in Scotland. Oh, do a little better, you're fine. I'm as good as the next man. I come to church and I put my penny in every week.

There's so many people who think like that. Do you remember when Princess Diana was killed? And do you remember shortly afterwards there was a Sunday school teacher who appeared in all the newspapers?

And what was her crime? Suggesting perhaps to the children that Princess Diana might not be in heaven just because she was a nice person. And society took on bridge and was horrified and disgraced.

[32 : 10] How could you dare suggest that Diana was not in heaven? She was a lovely person. You see? Justification by works, by religion. But no, says Paul, that's a delusion.

It's a dangerous delusion. It's a delusion from hell itself. The Old Testament makes clear itself. Verse 16. By works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

That's a quote from Psalm 143, verse 2. It says, no one living is righteous before you. Not Jews or Gentiles. Not good religious people or bad ones.

Not complete pagans. Not people of any religion or no religion. The whole world is guilty before God, says Paul. No one ever has or ever will become acceptable to God by what they do.

No one can ever offer God what he desires. We can try our best to keep the Ten Commandments or all of these things. But every one of them we know we've broken again and again.

[33 : 21] Even if we could keep every letter of the Lord, Jesus himself is the one who exposes the heart, isn't he? You can say you don't commit adultery, but who hasn't committed adultery in his heart? Every moment of every day we break the greatest command, have no other gods before me.

as we make ourself into gods. We're self-centered. All of the works of the law, whatever they are, whether we think that they are in a negative sense, us trying to earn our own religion, or even if what Paul means here by the works of the law are the good things that the law demands that we ought to do, the way we ought to live as Christian people.

The right response to God's revelation, even if it's those things, doing those things cannot justify us. As far as gaining righteousness concerned, gaining acceptability with God, they're utterly worthless.

They even think that they could be any use to us. Just betrays the fact that to quote Anselm of Canterbury, we have not yet begun to understand what a great and heavyweight sin really is.

Our predicament is far worse, far more appalling than any of our imaginations could begin to understand. Just need to read the language of the New Testament, it's very, very horrific.

[34 : 47] It talks about the wrath of God being poured out from heaven on all mankind. We're told we're objects of wrath, we're without God, we're without hope, Ephesians chapter 2.

The pictures in the Revelation are hideous. It's Jesus himself, by some of the harshest words, some of the most horrific things, about hell, where the fire never dies.

And there's nothing that we can do, nothing at all according to Paul here, no works of the law, however bad or however good they may be, that can remedy it. Certainly not the law, Jewish or any other.

Dukes says this, Satan would have us prove ourselves holy by the law which God gave to prove us sinners. The law simply lights up in neon lights our failure, our lack of righteousness, and our desperate need for the justification that eludes us.

But in terms of saving, in terms of a saving function, that's all it can do. Shows up how utterly sinful sin is. It can never save us.

[36 : 02] It can only condemn us. Paul, when he's talking about the use of the law, he is referring to its function for Israel, for the Jewish people, before Christ came, to show up their sin, to show up their need for mercy, to point them to the coming Christ.

But it's also true, isn't it, at a personal level. A person won't cry out to be found unless they're lost, and realise they're lost. Somebody won't beg for pardon and mercy unless they understand that they're condemned.

And in that sense, in seeing the law as God's holiness and his requirement for himself, we must allow the law to do its God-given duty, even today. See, there's often a great deal of reticence to do that in the Christian church, to soft-pedal sin and judgment.

There's far too much stress on our own needs and whether we will accept God or not, rather than on God's demands and whether he's going to accept us. Of course, we mustn't preach the law in the sense of offering it as a potential way of salvation.

Of course not. Some people do. Come to church, do your duty, do this, God will accept you. No, that's nonsense. But we must allow the law of God, in terms of its revelation of his requirements, we must allow that to do its negative work, to declare guilt, to show that we are in need of God's mercy.

[37 : 37] Listen to John Stott, is this not why the gospel is so unappreciated today? Some ignore it, others ridicule it. So in our modern evangelism, we cast our pearls, the costliest pearl being the gospel, before a swine.

People can't see the beauty of the pearl because they have no conception of the filth of the pigsty. No man has ever appreciated the gospel until the law has first revealed them to himself. It's only against the inky blackness of the night sky that the stars begin to appear.

It's only against the dark background of sin and judgment that the gospel shines forth. Of course, the gospel itself contains both law to condemn us and grace to relieve us.

Paul's letter to the Romans has three chapters of condemnation and God's wrath. Before you come in chapter 3 to the but now, the righteousness of God is revealed. It has to.

Otherwise, we don't know what we're being saved from. What's the point? So if that's the devastating testimony against us, if that's the hopelessness of any human works, works of the law or any other, how on earth can we be justified?

[38 : 48] How can we be accepted? Well, that's Paul's second alternative, isn't it? Over and against the way of religion, the way of the flesh, the way of humanity, we have the way of the grace, the way of the grace of the gospel.

Three times in verses 15 and 16 he says here, it's by Jesus Christ only. Through faith in Jesus Christ, we also have believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by Christ, not by works of the law.

By works of the law, no one will be justified. See, you don't get justified before God just by being sorry. That's not enough. Regret, even tears, even repentance, none of that's any good.

That was the word we sang, could my tears forever flow, all for sin could not atone. That's right. How can this be then?

How can Christ save us? Well, the Bible has two pictures of man. Man the sinner. Paul talks about that being in Adam, the guilty, the ruined, the alienated one facing death.

[40 : 04] He talks about a second man, Christ, the last Adam, who is perfect and sinless, who is in fellowship with God. And the glory of the gospel is that on the cross of Christ a great exchange takes place.

One takes the place of the other. Christ in his life perfectly fulfills all the demands of the law, everything we could never do, offers to God the perfect life.

And Christ in his death pays the penalty that we owed but could not pay for the disobedience of all the sin that we've committed. And all this, Paul says, is the basis of our justification.

This is the faith, the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. That's what justifies us. 2 Corinthians 5 and 1, God made him who had no sin to be sin, that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

All that was ours, all that guilt, all that condemnation was born on his cross. He died our death. And all that's his, his righteousness, his perfect obedience, his faithfulness, well it becomes ours through his death and resurrection.

[41 : 15] He was delivered over to death for our sins when he was raised for our justification, says Paul in Romans 4. That's what we call substitutionary atonement.

Westminster Confession puts it this way, we are justified by imputing the obedience and sacrifice of Christ to us. The faithfulness of Jesus Christ becomes ours in God's sight.

guilty, violent, helpless, we, spotless Lamb of God was he. Full atonement. Can it be? Yes. But how do we receive that?

How does it work? How do we receive that righteous transfer? The answer says Paul is by faith alone. We're justified by Christ's faithfulness alone. We receive it by faith alone.

Verse 16. We have also believed in Christ Jesus. Chapter 3, verse 2. Let me ask you this. How did you become justified?

[42 : 16] Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law? No. By the hearing of faith. It's by faith alone. The righteousness of God comes through faith in Jesus Christ, says Paul, to all who believe.

Romans 3, verse 22. Or Romans 4, verse 5. To the man who does not work, but trusts God, who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited for righteousness.

And so Paul rams at home here three times, not by works, but by Christ. Not by works, but by faith. As Martin Luther said, he does it to beat it into our heads.

Because we find it so difficult, easy to understand in our minds, but very, very hard. To live on it. To understand it. But he does it because this is the great liberating power of the gospel.

This is what sets people free from death into life, from the old age into the new creation. This gospel was the gospel, remember, that set Paul free on the Damascus Road.

[43 : 25] Opened up a whole new world to him. Changed the whole ancient world. This was the gospel that was understood by Martin Luther in the 16th century and he said, the door of paradise was thrown open to me.

It changed the face of modern Europe and the world. And so it is with every believer who's begun to sense the word of God touching and pricking them, throwing up in their lives where things are wrong, where they cannot be right with God.

Showing them, perhaps with increasing despair, their own impotence, their own hopelessness. And then at last the light breaks in on their soul and it's all Christ, it's not me.

Paul makes it so personal here, we also have believed in Christ Jesus. This is real. The doors of paradise were flung open to me and to you Galatians.

This is my gospel, this is the only gospel, this is the gospel I preach to you in which you believe, this is how you began. That's why he'd fight to the death to preserve that message because only that kind of gospel, only a real understanding of the depths of God's mercy, his grace in Christ, can even begin to help us to live real Christian lives.

[44 : 50] We're all our service, we're all our work for Christ. He's never trying to win acceptance with him or a better status or anything else in the fellowship. simply living out a response of the wonder that we know to be true.

Oh how great a debtor I am into grace. That's how the gospel makes us slaves to Christ. That's how people can be used by God to do great and mighty things throughout their life because they've come to understand this.

Let me read to you from the biography of Robert Moffat, one of Scotland's greatest missionaries and one of my ancestors. He was a young boy of 16 when he left his home in Caron Shore and went down to Cheshire in England to become a market gardener.

He promised his mother that he would read a chapter of the Bible every morning and every evening. Much to his chagrin he had to keep to that because in those days boys listened to their mothers. But here's what he said, I tried hard to stifle conviction but I couldn't help reading much in the epistles and especially in the epistle to Romans.

This I did with an earnestness I tried in vain to subdue. I felt wretched but still I didn't pray till one night I rose in a state of horror from a terrific dream. I fell on my knees and felt as if my sins like a great mountain were tumbling down upon me and that there was but a step between me and the place of woe.

[46 : 15] Then followed the struggle between hope and despair. I tried to reform but not by avoiding grossly immoral conduct for I'd never been guilty of that but by forsaking foolish and worldly compass and the people who were forsaking foolish and worldly compasses.