

INTRODUCTION

Charlie Chaplin was the first movie actor in America to attain superstar status. He was the king of the silent movie era in the early 20th century. He was most famous for playing "the tramp." The tramp was such a popular character that look-alike contests were held all around the country. People vied for prizes by imitating Charlie Chaplin as the tramp. In fact a young up-and-coming actor was first noticed when he won a Charlie Chaplin look-alike contest in Cleveland. His name was Bob Hope.

Charlie Chaplin enjoyed telling the story of when a Chaplin look-alike contest was held in San Francisco. As a joke, Chaplin decided to quietly enter it. Amazingly, he failed to even make the finals! The judges decided five other men looked more like Charlie Chaplin than Charlie Chaplin did! Charlie Chaplin was staring the judges in the face and they didn't recognize him.

Sometimes we think a Christian is someone who performs a lot of outwardly religious deeds: Praying five or six times a day; attending church every time the doors are open; or giving money for the poor.

The Bible teaches that a real Christian is someone who has been rescued by God when they couldn't help themselves. The message of Galatians is there is nothing we can do to rescue ourselves from our sinful condition. Instead, God graciously initiated a rescue mission by sending Jesus to die on the cross.

We know WHY God rescued us, because He loves us. But sometimes we're a little fuzzy about HOW God rescues sinners. To understand this better, let's review the context. Paul was in the church at Antioch that had both Jewish and Gentile members. God's grace was the glue that held these two factions together. Peter came to visit from Jerusalem, and, at first, he had no problem eating with Gentile Christians. He didn't even object to pork barbecue being served.

But Peter's behavior changed when some Jewish VIPs came from the church in Jerusalem. Suddenly Peter started acting like a Pharisee. He wouldn't eat with Gentiles, nor would he eat their dirty food. This total reversal in behavior made Paul's blood boil with righteous indignation. Peter and even Barnabas were acting two-faced: They were hypocrites. When Paul wrote this years later, he still remembered the details.

Galatians 2:14. "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

Then Paul continued to explain to Peter and the others that salvation is not obtained by obeying rules, it is by grace alone. And the process God uses to save us, or rescue us is called justification. This entire message is on the amazing Bible doctrine of justification, how God saves sinners.

I love Bible doctrines. When I was younger I remember telling someone, "I like New Testament doctrine so much, I'm going to name all my children after New Testament doctrines." My oldest

daughter is named Jennifer Christian and my second daughter is Laura Grace. I told Cindy if we had a boy, I was going to name him John Justification Dykes. I think she's glad we didn't have a boy!

Most Christians know a lot about faith and grace, but if you asked them what justification means, they scratch their heads. Let's do an experiment. Turn to your neighbor for a second and define justification in 20 words or less. Go ahead; try it. Or you may just admit, "I don't have a clue." That's okay, because in a few minutes I hope everyone has a greater understanding and a deeper appreciation for justification. We're going to talk about the definition of justification; the explanation of justification; and the application of justification.

1. THE DEFINITION OF JUSTIFICATION

Paul used the word "justify" or "justification" 19 times in all of his letters, and four of those times are in these two verses. These are words Paul continued to speak to Peter and the other hypocrites.

Galatians 2:15-16. "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

Paul writes that we aren't justified by keeping rules and regulations. We're justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Let me give you a working definition of justification in less than 20 words: "Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ." That's so important I want to repeat it several times with emphasis on the important words.

First, "Justification is the ACT OF GOD whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ." In other words, it is an act, NOT a process. No Christian is "more justified" than another. Later in Galatians we'll talk about another fifty-cent word, Sanctification. Now that's a process. Sanctification is the continual process God uses to conform us to the image of His Son.

Justification isn't something we do; it's something God has done. The Bible speaks of justification as a done deal. Paul wrote, "Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ." (Romans 5:1) He didn't say "we are being justified," or "we will be justified." It was a past reality. We HAVE been justified.

Second, "Justification is the act of God whereby He DECLARES the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ." In other words, it doesn't mean God MAKES you righteous. If you don't feel very righteous, that's okay. In our sinful nature, there is nothing good about us. Justification involves courtroom language. The Judge DECLARES you righteous, even though you're guilty. In justification God says, "Not guilty. Never guilty. Never guilty again!"

Third, "Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing SINNER righteous in Jesus Christ." God justifies sinners, not "good people." The reason some people haven't been

justified is because they continue to insist they're good people; they refuse to admit they are sinners.

Finally, "Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner RIGHTEOUS in Jesus Christ." I've been talking a great deal about righteousness in this Galatians series. A few weeks ago a lady came back to the Bethany Suite after the message and said, "I'm a little confused about what 'righteousness' is. Can you explain it to me in simple terms?" For a second I smiled as I thought, "There are entire theological libraries devoted to that topic, and I'm going to summarize it in one sentence?" So after thinking for a second I said, "Righteousness simply means 'right standing' before God." That's it in a nutshell. A sinner standing in his or her own attempts at righteousness can't stand before a Holy God. But when we stand before God IN Jesus Christ, we are clothed in HIS righteousness, and as Paul wrote in Ephesians 3:12, "In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence." If you try to approach God on your own goodness, you can't stand—you'll die. But if you approach God in Jesus, He sees the righteousness of Jesus.

Whenever I think about being justified, I remember a little word play I learned in college: Justified = "just-as-if-I'd never sinned." Dr. Warren Wiersbe makes a couple of good contrasts between justification, forgiveness and pardon. He writes: "Justification is not merely 'forgiveness,' because a person could be forgiven and then go out and sin and become guilty. Once you have been 'justified by faith' you can never be held guilty before God." "Justification is different from a 'pardon' because a pardoned criminal still has a record. When the sinner is justified by faith, God says, 'I will remember their sins no more.' (Jeremiah 31:34)." That's the definition of justification, now let's talk about

2. THE EXPLANATION OF JUSTIFICATION

Galatians 2:17-19. "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."

Paul addresses a misunderstanding many people have about grace. Some people abuse grace by having the attitude, "Well, I can sin all I want, because God's grace covers me." Paul addresses this when he pointed out that if God only justifies sinners, does that mean Jesus promotes sin? He said, "ABSOLUTELY NOT!" That's like saying a physician promotes sickness and death because they can help sick people. Paul contrasted Moses' law and God's grace by pointing out two truths.

(1) The Law kills

He said, "Through the law I died to the law." The reason God gave us the Old Testament law was to show us that we couldn't keep it! The principle throughout the Bible is, "The soul that sins, it shall die." If there was no law, we wouldn't know that we were sinners.

The law was only meant to diagnose sin, not to fix it.

A few months ago I had an EKG done as part of a regular physical. An electrocardiogram is a diagnostic tool used to discover heart problems. Fortunately my EKG revealed that I'm in great health. But can you imagine an EKG that not only revealed a heart problem, but if you had a heart problem, it would go ahead and kill you?

Let's say they programmed an EKG so that if the readings were abnormal or unhealthy, suddenly those little sticky probes became conductors and "wham!" they electrocuted you on the table. I don't know about you, but I'd never have an EKG! If I had a problem I wouldn't want to know it! By the way, that's the reason some people don't like to read the Bible. They don't like to learn that they have a sin problem, and that sin problem leads to death.

That's what the Old Testament law does. It diagnoses your sin, problem, but it gives you no hope of forgiveness. It kills us because it carries the death sentence. That's why the Bible says, "The letter [law] kills, but the Spirit gives life." (2 Corinthians 3:6)

(2) God gives life

The law kills, but when we place our faith in God's grace and trust Him for our justification, we truly discover life. Are you still struggling along trying to obey rules to make God happy? There is a better way and that is justification by faith, not works.

The year was 1505; the scene was Stotternheim, Germany. A young man named Martin was walking along a cobbled road. He was short and stocky and wore the dress of a University student. As Martin approached St. Anne's church in the village, a terrible thunderstorm suddenly broke. Before he could seek shelter, Martin was knocked to the ground by a lightning strike that hit the ground nearby. In stark terror young Martin cried out, "St. Anne, help me! I will become a monk."

And that's how Martin Luther became a monk in the Catholic Church, which was the only church at the time. He almost killed himself trying to please God. He prayed for hours and fasted for days. He refused blankets for his bed, choosing to shiver as a sign of piety. Several times he almost froze to death, but he was being "holy."

He later wrote: "If ever a monk got to heaven by monkery, I would have got there too. For if it had gone on much longer, I would simply have martyred myself to death with vigils, prayers, reading and other work."

It was only after Martin Luther read Galatians and Romans that he came to this life-changing truth: "the just shall live by faith." He fired a theological shot that is still heard around the world. The battle cry of the Protestant Reformation became "justification by faith."

Are you still a little unsure about what justification means? Do you recognize the word "justify" from the printing world? When you're writing documents, if you want the left and right margins to be even, they have to be justified. In the printing business, when the left and right margins are perfectly straight, it's called full justification—sounds Biblical doesn't it?

When I was in the 9th grade I took a typing class. How many of you remember the old manual typewriters with a bell that rang when you reached the end of the margin? You had to physically set the left margin by moving a little slide to stop the carriage return at the desired location. So you typed along and when the bell rang, you knew you were getting close to the right edge of the paper. So you'd slap the handle to move the carriage back to the stop. Flush left margins and ragged right margins were easy, but if you wanted to justify the margins, meaning the column of text had a straight left AND right margin, it was a headache. There was a meticulous process you went through to count the letters and spaces on each line. It would take several minutes just to justify a single line. When electric typewriters came along it was a little easier. But today, with computers, justification is only a mouse click away.

Justified margins means the left margin and the right margin are both straight; they agree. Justified people are those who have been made right with God. Here's God's standard on the left—absolute perfection—straight up. And here we are on the right—our lives are ragged. Religion or legalism is the attempt to JUSTIFY our lives with God's perfect standard. But we can't justify our lives to God's standard. Thankfully, God does the justification. It is His act, not ours!

3. THE APPLICATION OF JUSTIFICATION

Justification is a great truth, but what does it mean to me on a daily basis? Here's the application found in Galatians 2:20-21:

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

There are two powerful truths that reside under the umbrella of justification: Faith and grace. Let's see how can apply them to our lives.

(1) FAITH: Today I surrender to Jesus who lives in me

I realize preachers are often given over to superlatives and talk about the greatest and the highest, and the deepest truths of the Bible, but I'm not exaggerating when I say Galatians 2:20 has had the greatest impact on my life and ministry than any other verse in the Bible. Galatians 2:20 is my life verse. It's such a powerful, life-changing truth that next week I'm going to devote entire message to Galatians 2:20. The title is, “Are you Wired for 220?”

Let me give you a preview. For many years, I tried living the Christian life on my own. I tried loving people, only to be frustrated when I found myself resenting them. I tried to have peace on my own only to find myself plagued with worry. I tried to share my faith with others, and ended up having a guilt trip whenever a day passed and I hadn't witnessed to someone.

Then in college I read a little blue booklet published by Campus Crusade that asked, "Have you made the wonderful discovery of the Spirit-filled life?" I learned that the Christian life isn't ME trying to live it, because I always fail. The Christian life is surrendering to Jesus who lives inside of me. When I give up my will and surrender to His will, He lives His life through me.

Vance Havner expressed it this way: "The first discovery a Christian needs to make is that he cannot live the Christian life himself. Living the Christian life is not so much our responsibility but our response to His ability. Paul did not say, 'To me to live is Christ FIRST...' It was Christ-period! Christ was first, last, and everything between. Christ is not a way to live; He is our life!"

(2) GRACE: Today I depend on God's grace instead of my goodness

It takes faith to believe that Jesus lives in me, but it takes an understanding of grace to stop trying to be good and do good. Paul said, "If right-standing before God could be attained by keeping the law, then Christ died in vain." That's a powerful observation. If there is anything you and I could do to earn God's favor, then the crucifixion of Jesus was the biggest mistake in the universe.

The problem with depending on our own goodness instead of God's grace is that we end up comparing ourselves to other people. We look at a bad person and think, "I'm not perfect, but I'm better than him (or her)." You're using the wrong standard.

There was a man who was a foreman in a factory in a little town. One of his jobs each morning was to blow the factory whistle at noon and again at 4:30 p.m. Every morning on his way to work, as he was sitting at a stop sign, he would look over into the window of a jewelry store where a grandfather clock stood as a display. Every morning the foreman set his watch by the grandfather clock, then went to the factory and blew the whistle. Every morning, he'd set his watch and blow the whistle according to the time from the grandfather clock. One morning he stopped at the stop sign and the owner of the jewelry store just happened to be out there. So, he stopped and hopped out of his car and introduced himself. He said, "Hey, by the way I have a question for you." He said, "I set my watch every day by that grandfather clock, and I want you to tell me, how do you keep the time on that grandfather clock so precise?" The guy said, "I set it by the factory whistle twice a day." Think about it, both those guys clocks could be wrong because they were comparing themselves to each other rather to an infallible standard. There are a lot of people who compare themselves to one another, but God has set Jesus as our standard. We can't ever be that good, but we can trust in His grace.

CONCLUSION

On August 10 of last year, there was cave-in at a mine in Chile. Thirty-three miners were trapped a half-mile underground. At first it was feared they were dead, but when they were found to be alive, the Chilean government launched a massive rescue effort to save them from the darkness of the mine. The eyes of the world were on this unprecedented rescue attempt.

After being trapped in darkness for 69 days, the miners were rescued when the rescuers lowered a metal capsule named Phoenix 2. It was a long trip down and a long trip up, and there was only

room for one man at a time, but all the miners were rescued. As television networks around the world broadcast the rescue live, people cheered and celebrated. As each miner emerged they were wearing shirts that said, "Thank you, Lord!" And there was a verse about how God has the mountains and the depths in His hand.

The rescue attempt cost the Chilean government \$20 million, but no one even suggested it was too high a price to pay. But the rescue didn't cost the miners a penny. In fact, they received their pay and huge bonuses after they were rescued. Some have called it the greatest rescue mission in history, but there was a greater rescue mission that happened 2,000 years ago.

Can you imagine what it would be like to spend 69 days trapped a half-mile below the surface? That's a picture of our lives before God rescued us. We were trapped in darkness and despair. Jesus descended all the way to planet earth to provide a way for us to escape the consequences of our sin. Like the Phoenix 2 escape capsule, Jesus doesn't save groups; He saves individuals.

What did the miners have to do to be rescued? First, in order to be rescued, they had to have faith. They had to believe help was coming from above and that help would carry them to another world above.

Then all they had to do was to put their faith into action. When the rescue capsule arrived, all they had to do was get into it. Their rescue came from above. Each miner had a choice. When the capsule arrived, they could choose to get in and let it carry them to the world above, or they could have said, "No thanks!" I can't imagine why a single miner would reject the free offer of a rescue. And I can't imagine why a person would say, "No thanks" to God's incredible offer to rescue them. What's more ludicrous, for those miners to say, "no" to a man-designed rescue vehicle to save them from physical death, or for people to say, "no" to the God-designed vehicle to rescue them from eternal spiritual death?

They're making a movie about the rescue and some of the miners will talk about their experience. Let's imagine one of them looks at the camera and says, "I was trapped, but I saved myself. I dug a hole all the way to the top of a half-mile of hard rock and pulled myself out of the darkness." No way. But there are still people today whose testimony is all about how good and religious they are. Justification means God did it, and all we did was hop on board!

That's how God rescues sinners. Have you accepted His offer to be rescued? You can do that today by admitting you'll never be good enough to rescue yourself, and believing that God can and will save you.

OUTLINE

THE CONTEXT: "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'"

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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes