

~ Justification by Faith Alone ~

The Bedrock of the Gospel

Paul's Dealing with False Teachers
Selected Passages from Romans and Galatians

National Expositor's Conference

Pune, May 2014

Robin Brown

SESSION 1

1. INTRODUCTION

The title of this seminar is “Justification by Faith Alone (JBFA) - The Bedrock of the Gospel. Paul’s dealing with False Teachers, Selected Passages in Romans and Galatians.”

Quite a lengthy title, which was changed from my original idea of an Exposition of Galatians, examining the Tactics of False Teachers. What happened is that I realized as I worked for this seminar that the heart of Galatians - God’s grace in JBFA was the focus of the attack and defended by Paul. I ended asking myself would I readily and easily recognize a distortion of the cardinal doctrine of the faith let alone defend it?

This is what the false teachers sought to destroy in Galatia. By confusing JBFA, they destroy grace and annihilate the gospel. I realized that we had better know this doctrine thoroughly and like Paul be able to articulate it clearly and be able to defend it. This is really how he dealt with these false ideas that threatened to destroy his flock, with a very clear articulation of Justification by Faith Alone.

Can You Identify Genuine Doctrine?

I worked in auditing and accounting for many years and audited retail concerns, oil refineries, hotels and banks. I remember that in the one particular bank I audited how they used to train tellers to find counterfeit money. You may have heard this already, but I can tell you it is true.

Instead of giving them thousands of fake and counterfeit \$20 or \$100 bank notes or bills to examine in detail, they locked them in a room, each day, for 5 days with real bank notes. Yes real ones, not fake ones! The prospective tellers were supposed to take these genuine bank notes and examine to the smallest detail, hold them, feel them, describe them, touch them, even smell them, for an entire week.

Then they were given a stack of notes to count rapidly and within that stack were scattered a few counterfeit notes. If they pulled out the bad ones in the quick timed process - they passed the test, otherwise it is back into the room for another 5 days. Believe me, after going through this a few times living with the genuine notes they can spot a fake bank note from a mile away!

This is what you ought to do with doctrine. This is the ultimate strategy for dealing with false teachers:

Firstly, you should spend so much time with Scripture familiarizing ourselves with the Word of God, knowing the truth of doctrine, use sound hermeneutical principles to examine it, hold it, feel it, describe it, touch it and even metaphorically smell it, and so easily recognizing the genuine Gospel of grace! Perhaps this is where the analogy breaks down because the Gospel must first take root in your own heart!! When a false teacher and his teaching appears on TV, on the radio, in printed books, even in your church, no matter how influential or articulate he may be, you can immediately spot the fake idea, articulate what is wrong with the teaching, and take protective action over your families and your flocks.

Secondly, you need to practice what you preach, you need to live it out! Paul often pointed to his own life, not for his glory, but as a defense against the excesses of false teachers. Amen! We could end the seminar right there. But I think it will help to examine a real live example in Paul and the letter to the Galatians.

The Reaction of a Genuine Spiritual Leader

Paul was arguably best pastor/ preacher after Christ! But we often have misconceptions of what a *spiritual guru* ought to be. Perhaps you think of him/her as wearing long flowing white robes, soft spoken, gentle, offending no one, accepting of all “spiritual” teaching.

That is not quite the picture you will get of *guru* Paul. Most of Paul’s letters were written as a *polemic* to directly and vociferously confront an issue of bad doctrine or bad practice in the church. Galatians is not an exception!

In Paul you see the heart of a true spiritual guru - motivates by love, he acts to save his children. A servant leader, passionately responding to the news that attempts are being made to seduce his his spiritual children away from the Gospel, away from the grace of Christ to something that will condemn them to hell.

Like the urgent cry of a loving parent concerned about the imminent danger facing his children, Paul conveys strong rebuke rapidly from his pen, sentences are short, transitions are tense, adjectives are shockingly vivid and verbs are few, bold and strong. It would seem to some, that these are the “harshest” words from a spiritual guru that you will ever find in Scripture! But what is at stake?

Life and Death Issue

In other letters he appears far more amiable towards his children and other “competing” teachers, look at **1 Corinthians 3** where the believers there were divided around leaders and were drifting back to worldliness bringing it into the church.

“5 What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave opportunity to each one. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. 7 So then neither the one who [plants] nor the one who [waters] is anything, but God who [causes] the growth. 8 Now he who [plants] and he who [waters] are one; but each will receive his own reward according to his own labor. 9 For we are God’s fellow workers; you are God’s field, God’s building.” (1 Cor 3:5-9)

(NOTE: in verse quote formatting: [] = participle, **Bold** = verb, >><< = Imperative)

Seems here Paul is much more gracious! Was he having a bad day when he wrote Galatians? I think the difference is that the patients in the Galatian hospital are in the ICU, they are facing life and death - eternal issues! It is critical! The bedrock of the Gospel, justification by faith alone is being turned into a cancer and from such a disease, unless its onset is arrested immediately, death results. The Galatians are beginning to find false teaching attractive and lull themselves spiritually comatose as they desert the grace of Christ. Their heart monitors in the ICU are flashing and beeping, beginning to show straight lines and Paul, their shepherd, could not stand by and simply let this happen.

Pastoral Passion for Truth, No Matter the Cost!

Any of you here today who have any leadership position in the church ought to have the same concern for the spiritual vitality of your sheep. If you are a father you should be concerned about the spiritual vitality of your wife and family.

You have a responsibility to care and feed the sheep (John 2:17) as Paul did. The church was purchased with the blood of Christ (Acts 20:28) and so as teachers or leaders in any capacity you bear the burden of being judged with a greater strictness (James 3:1). Paul said to the Corinthians; "For I feel a divine jealousy for you, since I betrothed you to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ" (2 Cor 11:2). Do understand what it is to have the emotion and power of marital jealousy for your own spouse should another come alongside and try to capture her love away from you? Paul is saying this is the same strength of emotion in godly jealousy ought you to have for the spiritual well-being of your flock!

False teachers, worldly philosophies, superstitions, even cultural traditions turned into a means of grace, will rob the flock of Christ and place them in bondage to a false gospel. You are charged to keep watch over the flock, to watch over your self, the way you live and a watch over your doctrine (1 Tim 4:16). God requires of you that you be found trustworthy in life (1 Cor 4:1-2) an example in life, cutting it straight with the truth of the Gospel (Gal 2:14) and accurately handling the truth of the Scripture (2 Tim 2:15).

You certainly would not want to have your loved ones operated on by a careless and badly trained surgeon, would you? How much more when it is a matter of eternal life or death for those under your care. You and I are commanded to feed your sheep the whole counsel of God otherwise to shrink from such a responsibility is to let them die in the ICU and have the blood of the flock on your hands: "

26 "Therefore, I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. 27 For I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole purpose of God." (Acts 20:26-27). "15 For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being [saved] and among those who are [perishing]; 16 to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? (2 Cor 2:15-16)

"... when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, 8 [dealing] out retribution to those who do not [know] God and to those who do not [obey] the gospel of our Lord Jesus.9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power" (2 Thess 1:7-9)

When you understand the mortal deception that was underway among Paul's spiritual children in Galatia, and if you understand the inestimable cost of the Cross and if you have the heart of a genuine Shepherd of the sheep, perhaps then you can understand why Paul was so provoked when he heard the news from Galatia. Another message was being preached, really looked like a slight modification to the Gospel and yet it would bring massive eternal ruin to all those that accepted it. The Galatians were in a very serious predicament.

Do You Understand the Importance of Doctrine?

Do you shrink from declaring the Scripture? Therefore the subject matter of this seminar - justification by faith alone apart from the works of the law - is essential. Do you know how to defend this doctrine? This is what false teachers will attack in the name of Christianity, even in this modern day because they know it is the bedrock of the Gospel, and to undermine this truth above any other, is to have a form of Christianity with no power, cross, no Savior, no life, and no grace.

The Reformers, especially Luther considered Justification by Faith as "*the article upon which the church stands or falls.*" It was the main issue of dispute in his day and since that time Justification by Faith Alone has been the defining article of evangelical Christianity. It is the bedrock of the Gospel, for without this doctrine there is no Gospel. As we do this study we will see that the issue is in fact Justification By faith ALONE. It is not so much the "faith" but the "alone" that has caused much dispute, and has been the focus of attack to which false or misinformed teachers bring down.

Key Verse for this Seminar

Gal 2:21 says: "If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose"

Justification brings to our account, in the Reformers terms, an "alien" righteousness. But if this righteousness were to come to our account through law, or if it were to be any way "completed" through starting to keep the law or if we elevate any human religious exercise or cultural tradition to the status of "necessary to be a saved Christian," then Jesus died for no purpose, for nothing. And if He died for no purpose, we are still in our sins, and then those who have died in Christ have indeed perished. Paul was at great pains to rescue the minds of his children from lure of these false ideas and he called down a curse on all those who spread wrong doctrine "*because all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse*" (Gal 3:10). Even though the religious law keeping looked good and seemed right, in effect the Galatians would cut themselves off from Christ. "*You are severed from Christ* (Gal 5:14), then there is no one to bear our curse, because Christ had redeemed them from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for them (Gal 3:13).

In this seminar I hope to awaken or at least re-ignite the importance of guarding the flock and guarding the flock from any teaching that waters down this key doctrine - justification by faith alone.

Often the use of the word “doctrine” turns people off. They say “doctrine divides,” and we should all be “united” as Christians, so throw out doctrine. However, I would submit that doctrine also unites. It unites us to one Lord, one faith and one baptism. Doctrine moves the will and the mind. It is in the realm of the inner person, the will, the ideas and the thoughts that men are taken captive, control the mind and you control the whole person.

“3 For though we [walk] in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, 4 for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. 5 We are [destroying] speculations and every lofty thing [raised] up against the knowledge of God, and we are [taking] every thought captive to the obedience of Christ“ (2 Cor 10:3-5).

Yet, doctrine on its own does not save us (even the demons are orthodox), but doctrine correctly informs us of how we are saved. Even a personal relationship with Christ will not save you unless it is a saving relationship. For example, Satan had a personal relationship with Jesus. Satan knew Jesus personally. It was a relationship of deception, hostility and estrangement from him. Therefore, we are all related to Christ, but we are all not united to Christ, that union comes through justification by faith and faith alone.

So I propose to tackle this subject as follows:

- 1) Look at Background and Context of Galatians.
- 2) Give you a Definition of Justification by Faith Alone as we do a short Scriptural Survey of the word “justify.”
- 3) A look at Scripture to see how JBFA is related to salvation issues such as the Spirit, Faith and Works.
- 4) Finally a look at Modern Heresy that misconstrues this doctrine so we would be warned!

SESSION 1

2. THE BACKGROUND

Grace to You in Galatia! How did they hear the Gospel?

Where did these churches come from?

These are extensive notes and available in the PDF file only.

SESSION 1

3. THE OCCASION FOR THE LETTER

Dangerous Times: Wolves Among the Sheep!

The Timing of the Letter

Paul's first contact with the Galatians had first happened in around AD 44-45 on his first missionary journey, then about 5 yrs later on his second missionary journey with Silas and he added Timothy (Acts 16:6) to the team in about AD 50.

Galatia been the region to experience the first fruits of the Gospel among the Gentiles, and had heard the Gospel from Paul himself. News of their amazing conversion had shaken even the Jewishness of church back in Jerusalem precipitating the first ever church council - the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 in about AD 50.

Paul started his third journey (Acts 18:23) in about AD 52 and he had a reunion with the Galatians (Acts 18:23). He spent some years in Ephesus (Acts 19:1ff) and the surrounds, wrote 1 Corinthians and then after this Paul was likely to have travelled into Macedonia then on into Greece arriving in Corinth in late AD 55 and possibly it was around early AD 56 when he heard amazing news about the Galatians and this prompted him to write this letter we have in our Bibles today. In addition he wrote to the Rome church, whom had not met Paul, from Corinth as well.

Perhaps this is why Paul said to the Galatians in his letter: "I am amazed that you are SO QUICKLY deserting . . ."

It was certainly not a small thing for Paul to hear that these first fruits among the Gentiles were now turning grace into works and were seeking to "complete" their salvation on their own. Paul is stunned to hear what is going on, instead of dealing and dispatching with the false teachers, they accepted them as brothers and welcomed their ideas as the same Gospel, or even perhaps a "more complete Gospel."

Even though Paul is stunned he is not speechless. "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in grace of Christ and are turning to a different Gospel." (Gal 1:6). "O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you?" (3:1). "I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain" (4:11). "You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace" (5:4).

You can see the situation is serious. Paul knows it and they should know it. But instead of heaping another burden on them, he does not embark on a major comparative religion argument, he does not vent personal anger in an *ad hominem* attack, - he takes them back to to grace. He reminds them how they were saved, it was grace alone, it remains grace alone. He also reminds them of justification by faith alone. Even as he opens the letter he still starts with grace in his greeting: "Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ" (1:3).

The Strategy of False Teachers in Galatia

Why had this happened? After Paul had left Galatia on his third missionary journey, he was shortly thereafter followed by another group of people calling themselves followers of Christ, even Christians. Reading through Galatians and other epistles it is easy to discern their strategy:

1) Firstly claim to be Christians, brothers in Christ. Secondly, 2) they would claim that they have impressive credentials, well connected and well represented among the main apostles in Jerusalem. This aided in them being influential. They would then, thirdly 3) make bold statements undermining the historical teachers of the church in this case - Paul - by discrediting his apostleship as second hand (Gal 1:22). Fourthly, they would claim 4) their commission was superior - direct from the "pillars" (Gal 2:6 main influential apostles) their personal acquaintances in Jerusalem.

From this beach head and foothold - with their authority established and Paul's background demolished they would fifthly 5) discredit the message of Paul, the Gospel of Christ saying it was from men (Gal 1:10). Then sixthly, 6) they would introduce their message as the Gospel (Gal 1:9), showing it is not to change much, just perhaps "complete" the Gospel (Gal 4:10). Flattery is often used here to create the impression that they, the false teachers, have the Galatians best interests at heart (Gal 4:17).

"After all," you could imagine them saying, "Paul was underqualified but well-meaning brother, but in order not to give you more than you can handle, he gave you only part of the Gospel, as you know it is ineffective against ongoing sin and therefore inadequate to secure salvation. We will give you the truth - that is necessary for full acceptance before God (justification), keeping right before Him, to carry out certain requirements of the law, such as circumcision, keep certain festivals, abstain from certain foods (Gal 4:10). Moses had taught law and the works of the law have not changed - even the true children of Abraham carried these laws out and they were still in place." (Gal 3:6-9).

You can see their arguments from what Paul defends in the letter to the Galatians. Their ideas covered the “blessing of Abraham” (3:6-18) and being “sons of God” (3:23-4:7) and battling the “desires of the flesh” (5:16) making law observation necessary.

These people were commonly called themselves Christians but they were known as “Judaizers” as they required their followers to embrace certain requirements of the law as a necessity for salvation.

So effective were these false teachers' arguments and so convinced were the Galatians that some had even committed to submit themselves to the knife of circumcision, which was a major change since they came from pagan backgrounds and in their past they would have never accepted this practice at all.

This is something that is a danger to us even today, not only as leaders but it is danger among Christians in general. Let me tell you how.

The Gospel is accepted and embraced with great joy at first (Gal 4:14) often off the back of trials (Gal 3:4). But as time goes by, trials continue and we battle with sin daily we compare ourselves to others, we read books attend seminars and can be charmed away to false ideas about the victorious Christian life (Gal 3:1). We begin to wonder if there something we are lacking. We look for “more” in our salvation. We forget that the Christian life is an ongoing battle with sin (Rom 7) we never achieve sinless perfection this side of heaven. That is why Paul instructs us to put on the full armor of God in Eph 6. You put on armor because it is dangerous, you will take many hits, many trials. You will battle sin every day of your Christian life. But in all of this your salvation is secure in Christ. Your justification was granted by God, Christ's righteousness reckoned to you and all your sin reckoned to Christ. This is grace. It is not possible for a justified believer to overrule God and reverse or diminish his justification. We forget that the gospel is about grace, it is about justification by faith. This is the most liberating thought and grants you eternal hope. It is grace from the beginning, through our lives and we are presented to God the Father at the end because of that same grace, we cannot add to such a great salvation, we cannot “fill in the cracks.” Paul tells the Galatians to remember that it is still the same message of grace that he told them in the beginning, nothing has changed.

You will see that Paul spends a great deal of the first part of the letter establishing his apostolic credentials, as they were attacked. But not for his glory, but for the sake of showing the Galatians that his calling is legitimate and therefore his message is legitimate - it is the apostolic truth about the grace of salvation as revealed by directly Christ. It is Christ's Gospel. It is the same Gospel he preached everywhere with his brothers (1:2).

This Gospel is the only Gospel, sufficient to deliver them from this present evil age (1:4). Additional works have nothing to add, in fact they simply destroy that Gospel of grace and justification by faith, and even though religious exercises may sound like an attractive addition to the Gospel, adding any works to any part of the Gospel is no Gospel at all (1:7). It is the Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself for our sins (1:4), all our sins. This is the wellspring of salvation, justification, sanctification and glorification.

SESSION 1-2

4. DEFINING JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ALONE

The Fundamental Article of the Church that Must be Defended

To summarize up front the meaning of the word: Justification happens when you are declared by God to be right with Him solely on the basis of the substitutionary sacrifice accomplished by Jesus Christ on your behalf, on the cross. It refers to the legal action by God, by which He declares a person just in His sight. It is a permanent divine legal action which changes the status of a person before the omniscient presence of God, not changing the person himself.

1. The Importance of Key Biblical Terms

Now you will really need to get those thinking caps on and your fingers moving through your Bible. It is important that you do not mix up terms of salvation such as calling, regeneration, conversion, faith, repentance, justification, adoption, sanctification, perseverance and glorification otherwise you open ourselves to soiling the purity of the Gospel.

For example, John Murray makes an important distinction between regeneration and justification:

Regeneration is an act of God in us; justification is a judgment of God with respect to us. The distinction is like that of the distinction between the act of a surgeon and the act of a judge. The surgeon, when he removes an inward cancer, does something in us. That is not what a judge does—he gives a verdict regarding our judicial status. If we are innocent he declares accordingly.

The purity of the gospel is bound up with the recognition of this distinction. If justification is confused with regeneration or sanctification, then the door is opened for the perversion of the gospel at its center. Justification is still the article of the standing or falling of the Church. (Redemption Accomplished and Applied)

For example look at **Romans 8:30** and you see the many terms involved in salvation are listed here in a chain of events, here they are all used as verbs:

and these whom He **predestined**, He also **called**; and these whom He **called**, He also **justified**; and these whom He **justified**, He also **glorified**.

In the Galatian churches false teachers caused confusion by linking justification with works, the idea that justification means human effort, obscuring the fact, that to mix the two, (justification and works), implied deserting Christ!

GAL 1:6 I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who [called] you by the grace of Christ,

The suddenness was amazing. Paul had spent much time there. It was also amazing because it looked like desertion. Desertion is the same term used for “fall away” or “become apostate.” In the Hellenistic world of Paul’s day it meant the one who leaves one school of thought for another. But it is also here in the text in the present tense and in Greek that means the desertion was currently underway, it was not complete, the process had started. It was amazing because it was desertion not from a human army, but from Christ Himself. **Gal 5:2-4** would certainly bear this out as Paul says “If you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you.” Their understanding of the meaning of justification had changed to include their human effort, is this a correct understanding?

This is why it is imperative for you to be rooted in the grace of Christ. It is important for you to know what justification by faith alone really means. It is hubris (arrogance) to think this would never happen to us. The Galatians had the best pastor in the world, save Christ and it happened to them, could it happen today?

Admittedly, some Christians do not start off with a planned attack but the fear of men, wanting to be recognized in Academic Circles, leads to arrogance and compromise of the truth. May the Lord preserve us from this!

However, as in Galatia, it can come from planned diabolical attack. Like experienced guerrillas who know that the most effective way of dealing out death is to cause a hemorrhage in the heart of their victims. So these false teachers knew that to aim their weapons at the meaning of “justification” is cause a hemorrhage in the heart of the Gospel.

Using what appeared to be a simple preference of what to eat and who to eat a meal with in Antioch as an example, Paul immediately identifies the same serious problem in the key verses in this letter, that had also radically affected Christians in Galatian churches (Gal **2:15-21**):

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."

2. The Meaning of the Word "Justify."

Four times the word "justified" is used in the key passage **Gal 2:15-21**, therefore understanding the word "justified" is critical to understanding Galatians.

Much of the debate on this word "justify" today is about whether it is a "status" conferred as by a judge or a "quality of life" that is lived. If it is to do with the latter, then justification is the beginning of a human-divine process which will end in a final status yet to be given to the sinner. But since the Reformation and clear exegesis, this word in salvation texts was held to refer only to a status declared by God bringing about a real right relationship, a declared or imputed position, rather than human change plus a potential situation in the future.

Before we look at Gal 2:15-21 in more detail we ought to do a word study on "justify" and record our observations as this will help us understand this text. There is not enough space here to show an entire Biblical word study on "justify" or "justification." But I will mention a few texts which you can go and examine yourself and do more detailed work.

In determining the meaning of any word the context is determinative. There are a few examples from the Old Testament which was written mostly in Hebrew, but these are from the Greek translation of the OT - Septuagint. [You can also see a good summary in Wayne Grudem's *Systematic Theology* (p. 272ff).]

3. Word Study on Justify

To start with then, there is one group of terms in the Greek for this term: *dikaio* (adjective), *dikaiosis* (noun), *dikaioo* (verb). In English the term may be translated "justification" or "righteousness." Obviously then when they translate in our English bibles the word can have either meaning depending on the context. When used of persons it is translated "righteousness" and usually refers to an upright life demonstrating a "moral or ethical standard of what is right." So for example Joseph was righteous in Mat 1:19 and in Luke 1:6 Zachariah and Elizabeth were also. This does not mean they were living in a state of perfect sinlessness. It has more the sense of living in an upright way before the eyes of their contemporaries.

4. Word Study: in the OT

So then how is this word used in the OT? We want to establish the legal or forensic meaning. Here are a few key examples.

Exodus 23:7 "Keep far from a false charge, and do not kill the innocent or the righteous, for I will not acquit the guilty.

This has a legal meaning as lawsuits and legal proceedings are in the context. Do not kill the innocent or righteous does not mean that we are not to kill those who are sinlessly perfect, but it is those that have this status before the law. It is a legal term, not a statement about their internal moral being.

God will not acquit (justify) the guilty - this is true God in his justice will not pass over the wicked, this would be a travesty of justice. This is why being in the grace of Christ is to be blessed (Rom 3)! Christ' substitutionary death on the cross is the sole basis for God to justify us!

Deut 25:1 "If there is a dispute between men and they go to court, and the judges decide their case, and they justify the righteous (or just) and condemn the wicked,

Again the context is what? The court room is in view here. It is clear from this then that the judge making a judgement - this person is right and that person is wrong - does not change the person. The innocent person was already innocent, just as the guilty man walked into the court already guilty. The judge announces a verdict. Justification by faith alone says the same thing. God declares a verdict, it is forensic it does nothing to change the person's constitution. Sanctification changes the person, if we confuse these we confuse justification by faith alone.

Prov 17:15 He who justifies the wicked and he who condemns the righteous, Both of them alike are an abomination to the Lord.

What is contrasted here? Does justify mean an internal change to the person? "Justifies" and "condemns" are contrasted declarations. Obviously, legal connotations are in view here. If justify meant to change the person internally then this proverb makes no sense. The proverb means it is very wrong to pronounce a wicked person innocent and condemn an innocent person.

Isaiah 5:23 Who justify the wicked for a bribe, And take away the rights of the ones who are in the right!

Who is this about? Again a legal context here as well. The depravity of the nation (Israel) is seen as if in the courtroom. Do the judges change the person internally? Judges are corrupt they pronounce wicked people innocent for bribes. Clearly an internal change in the person is not in view here.

Isaiah 53:11-12

11 As a result of the anguish of His soul,
He will see it and be satisfied;
By His knowledge the Righteous One,
My Servant, will justify the many,
As He will bear their iniquities.

12 Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,
And He will divide the booty with the strong;
Because He poured out Himself to death,
And was numbered with the transgressors;
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,
And interceded for the transgressors.

Now this key passage about the Messiah is a proclamation of the justifying work of Christ. Who does the justifying? Answer: The Messiah. How does he do this? He does this by bearing their iniquities. What is the basis for justification? The sin-bearing work of the Messiah is the sole basis of justification, not only a NT concept! This is consistent with other verses where there is a legal context, it is a declaration based on, in this case, the sin bearing of another.

We only looked at 5 passages, and there are many more in the OT. But this establishes that forensic meaning of the word “justify” in certain contexts. Now do we see this usage carried over to the NT? As you will see in key passages this is exactly how Paul uses it.

5. Usage in the NT - Romans

There are several passages where you will find the term “justifies,” “justify” or “justified” used but most occurrences are by Paul. Here there are key passages on justification: **Romans 3-5; 8:29-30; Galatians 1-5**. Paul primarily uses and OT passage - Gen 15:6 - as the basis of his justification argument: “*Then he believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.*” This also forms the basis of Paul’s argument in Romans and in Galatians. When Abraham believed God, God counted (or reckoned) it to him as righteousness. Imputation or reckoning had nothing to do with a subjective change made in Abraham.

So we need to look at some of these passages a little closer especially in Romans for this letter is Paul’s major theological exposition on salvation and helps us understand Galatians which is his second letter on salvation focused on **justification**.

Firstly we should give you some context to the argument leading up to Romans 3-5:

Romans is a letter by Paul to a church he never met. He seeks to articulate the Gospel and also illicit support for continued ministry to Spain. His letter is very logical, yet the first 4 chapters are very polemical or giving a clear defense of the Gospel against any error, such as what was happening in Galatia.

In **Romans 1** Paul launches his letter showing that God has indeed revealed Himself among men. In creation God’s eternal power and divine nature are on display (1:20). Man is held guilty for his rejection of this general revelation and he is without defense (1:20). Men continue to suppress the knowledge of God and so their reason becomes darkened and futile. Truth is exchanged for a lie and false worship - idolatry (1:25). The result is that every aspect of man is corrupted by sin to his core and the result man is totally depraved. However, Paul remains committed to the Gospel as it is “God’s power unto salvation.” (1:16).

This is obviously bad and good news, but there is more to come! Jews may be self-righteous after hearing Romans 1 since they are not “pagan sinners” but Paul’s purpose is to show that both Jew and Gentile can only be made right before God on the same basis! God is the one who justifies all, and all who respond in faith reflect “justness” before God (1:17).

Justification by Faith Alone is the theme of (1:18-4:25). So he continues his argument through **Romans Chapter 2**, that the reader, especially a Jew, will see that the charge of sinfulness is universal and being part of a group such as the nation of Israel does not guarantee you the favor of God. God’s judgement is impartial (2:6-10). This leads through to Chapter 3 of Romans where Paul convincingly argues the main point: “all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” (3:9). This sets the groundwork that all are in need of justification based on grace not merit, not work-religiosity. Human religious effort is a stench before God, no human work makes you better off than the next person, all are worthless (3:9,11).

Now in **Romans Chapter 3** from verse 19 to 31, Paul really gives the Gospel of Justification! Through the sacrificial death of Jesus God can deliver his people and maintain his Holy character.

19 Now we **know** that whatever the Law **says**, it **speaks** to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be **closed** and all the world may **become** accountable to God;

20 because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin.

21 But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been **manifested**, being **[witnessed]** by the Law and the Prophets, **22** even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who [believe]; for there **is** no distinction; **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** being [justified] as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus; **25** whom God **displayed** publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins **[previously]** committed; **26** for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would **be** just and the **[justifier]** of the one who has faith in Jesus. **27** Where then is boasting? It is **excluded**. By what kind of law? Of works? No, but by a law of faith. **28** For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law. **29** Or is God *the* God of Jews only? Is He not *the* God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, **30** since indeed God who will justify

the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith is one. **31** Do we then **nullify** the Law through faith? **May** it never be! On the contrary, we **establish** the Law.

Paul here looks at what it is to be in God's court, He is the judge. Verse 19 - the Law makes all humans accountable (means liable to prosecution) to God. Mouths will be shut in that court before the omniscient and omnipotent Judge. The picture here is the whole of humanity standing before God, accountable to Him for willful violation of His law, simply awaiting judgment.

Five times "justify" or "justified" is used. Look at 3:20 Here is why all of humanity will be prosecuted by God - no flesh will be "justified" by God by doing works of the law. Through the works of the law comes knowledge of sin in other words knowledge to humans that they are in bondage to sin. The function of the law was to highlight sin, man cannot be justified through law-keeping.

In 3:21 "But" shows a wonderful contrast. The righteousness of God is his character in justice and moral uprightness that brings Him all the glory. It is reflected in the Law. Now the righteousness of God is revealed through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. This is the only way to be saved, because God distinguishes between nobody - "for there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (3:22, 23).

Verse 24 sheds much light on the term "justification." All (Jew and Gentile) are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" (3:24).

We see then this justification is universal, it applies to every culture every tribe. It is also a gift of God, it is totally unmerited. The text implies that It is God who does this, it is grace. Look at the basis for this gift - It's same basis for every human - through the redemption in Christ (3:24). So we see then that justification is based on the sufficient and satisfactory sacrifice (propitiation) of Christ on the cross - "in His blood" (3:25).

The sacrificial death of Christ shows God to be "just" and the "justifier" of believers. This term "justifier" is repeated in 4:5. Note God is the justifier, not the religious person who strives and works and attempts to gain his own merit before God. This means all boasting is excluded (3:27). Justification then in Romans 3 is by God it is a gracious declaration in a legal sense about the sinner not based on his merit, but on the sacrificial death of Christ and it is simply appropriated by the eyes of faith not working law.

In **Romans Chapter 4:3-10** as in **Galatians 3** Paul gives an extensive explanation on the importance of Abrahams justification. Justification cannot be attained by works. What is important here is the use of "reckon, count, credit or impute" in this text and how it is linked being meritless justification. Paul also brings in Ps 32:1-2 in verses 6-8 as a second example by what David said. When you read 4:6-8 ask: Who is the blessed man here?

3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." 4 Now to the one who [works], his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. 5 But to the one who does not [work], but [believes] in Him **who [justifies] the ungodly**, his faith is credited as righteousness,

6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works 7 "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, And whose sins have been covered. 8 "Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness." 10 How then was it credited? While he [was] circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

Again and consistently legal language "justification" refers to something that God declares about one who simply exercises faith in His promises. It is a gift (verse 4) not something earned or due, not something deserved.

Key Question: How Can God Acquit the Guilty? (Justification and Imputation)

God justifies the ungodly? Who are they? A very important observation here is that justification is exercised by God towards the **ungodly**; i.e. unholy guilty sinners, characterized by sin (Verse 7,8). They are anyone who commit "lawless deeds" (Verse 7). That covers every human being including Abraham and David. God grants the ungodly a new status, obviously not an internal change. Yet how can God declare that we have no penalty to pay for sin, and that we have the merits of perfect righteousness, if we are in fact guilty sinners? How can God declare us to be not guilty but righteous when in fact we are unrighteous? This is done by God "reckoning" an alien righteousness to us.

When we say that God reckons Christ's righteousness to us it means that God counts Christ's righteousness as belonging to us. He "reckons" it to our account. This word "credit/reckon" is used five times in this text.

Looking back at **Romans 4:5** the word "justifies." Again it is clear that this is referring to God, He is the one who "justifies." But note the rest of verse 5: "*his faith is credited (imputed) as righteousness.*" Who credits? God does. He is the one who justifies and He is the one who imputes. This parallels with verse 6 "God credits (imputes) righteousness apart from works." Justify is equated with imputation right there. So therefore we can say that "justification" is linked to "crediting," other English terms for this Greek word (logidzetai) are "counting, reckoning or imputing" righteousness.

"Crediting" is an accounting term so you need to have in mind a ledger. Imagine a large multi-columned accounting book in which the persons wages are credited to him. Verse 5 however says it is not "work" but faith that results in righteousness being credited or imputed to the believer. This whole transaction in righteousness is "apart from works" (verse 6) meaning there is

nothing in any human being that brings this about. Can you see then that our faith is not the *basis* for imputation of righteousness? Faith believes and *appropriates* what the Justifier has done.

[Since it is accounting terminology, I cannot think of any earthly example other than it is like someone freely placed a billion dollars in your account and now your status on the Forbes 500 is now “Billionaire” it counts fully towards your status, yet it is still from someone else. You internally did not change.]

But this is not the only accounting transaction that occurs. In the same text verse 4:6-8 the blessedness that David speaks of, is because the “sin” side of the ledger is wiped out. Davids sins needed forgiveness, covering and non-accounting. It is God’s justification (verse 5) that implies an imputation of righteousness and a non-reckoning of sin (4:8). So in the end God is the One that completely justifies the ungodly, effectively imputing righteousness and not imputing sin. This is sometimes terms a “double-imputation.” **2 Cor 5:21** says that the Son is “made sin on our behalf” with the express result that we “become the righteousness of God in Him.”

Are you this blessed man or woman? It is the man who has given up all hope of achieving his own righteousness and acceptability before God. His or her faith is rests solidly in the One who graciously justifies the ungodly.

The rest of Chapter 4 verses 13-5:1 is Paul showing the supremacy of faith since the promises of God are to those who live by faith (true offspring of Abraham) in Christ since faith is the instrument by which God’s righteousness is appropriated to the believer.

REALITY CHECK:

Can you now define the term “Imputation?” This is an important non-separable part of Justification.

It is the act of God where He counts sinners righteous through their faith in Christ on the basis of Christ’s perfect obedience in life including His obedience unto death on the Cross.

In Romans Chapter 5 Paul continues to emphasize justification (5:1,9, 16-19, 21) but more the application of JBFA to his readers and the certainty of final glorification in the face of trials and tribulation. Just look at one text here to grasp “justify” or “justification” in **Romans 5:18-19**:

18 So then as through one transgression there resulted condemnation to all men, even so through one act of righteousness there resulted justification of life to all men. 19 For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.

Do you see the word “justification” in verse 18? It happens to the **many** who are connected to Christ, as condemnation happened to all men, all of us who are connected to Adam. Verse 19 says we were “made” sinners. Then many “will be made” righteous. The Greek word here means “appoint or counted.” Justification therefore and once again, is not based on what man had done or can do, but what Christ did - “the obedience of the One.” Again then we see that Justification and Imputation (counting) are inextricably linked up with the obedience of Christ in his life, his sinless obedience upholding the entire law and ultimately unto his obedience to his sacrificial death on the Cross.

In justification a real but alien righteousness is counted ours. In Christ then we can say that God counts us as having done all the righteousness that he requires. So again justification and the imputation of righteousness cannot be separated.

Finally, looking at Romans Chapter 8 where Paul shows that in JBFA absolutely nothing will change the divine guarantee he or she has in Christ. Especially verses 28-32 we see that justification is in what commentators have called the “Unbreakable Golden Chain of Redemption.” By this they mean it is a chain that cannot be altered, each term is part and parcel of God’s Redemption.

And we **know** that God causes all things to **work** together for good to those who [**love**] God, to those who [**are**] called according to *His* purpose. **29** For those whom He **foreknew**, He also **predestined** to *become* conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would **be** the firstborn among many brethren; **30** and these whom He **predestined**, He also **called**; and these whom He **called**, He also justified; and these whom He justified, He also **glorified**. **31** What then shall we **say** to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us? **32** He who did not **spare** His own Son, but **delivered** Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him **freely** give us all things?

This is so theologically rich we could be here for months! But perhaps note the following: Justification is for those whom God calls. Some false theology separates calling from justification. But from this only those whom God calls are justified. You cannot be called and not justified, or called and the work your justification yourself. Also note that all those who are justified will be glorified. Many religions teach you need to be active involved in gaining merit in your life before God, so that you will finally be glorified. Some teach that another man or religious leader or Pope has to declare you a “saint” after you have dies before you can be effectively glorified. Clearly from this God justifies and God glorifies, both are done totally by God and one cannot preclude the other.

Again, don’t miss the conclusion of verses 28-32 in **Romans 8:33-34**

33 Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? God is the one who [justifies]; **34** who is the one who [condemns]? Christ Jesus is He who [died], yes, rather who was [raised], who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us.

The idea of a “charge” is a court of law. Legal proceedings are in view here, the court room scene with accusers and a judge, it is unmistakable. “God is the one who justifies” places the source of the justification firmly with God’s (the

Judge) initiative no human work or merit is mentioned at all. The only intercessor mentioned is Christ who dies and was raised. The work of Christ is in view here.

Romans has extensive information on the term justification, but lets point out a few other passages

6. Usage in the NT - Other Letters

Take a look at **Phil 3:8-9**.

8 More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the [surpassing] value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, 9 and may be found in Him, **not** [having] a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith.

Paul says that he has a righteousness, not his own. The righteousness is “through” something. The instrument that appropriates this righteousness is “faith in Christ,” faith in the Messiah, the One who came and died, was buried and rose again. The source of the righteousness is not Paul, it comes from God. This would imply the imputation of Christ’s righteousness which happens in justification.

Turn to: **1 Cor. 1:30**

30 But by His doing you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

This is very clear that Christ became to us . . . righteousness. He becomes righteousness to us because at the beginning of the verse - we are “in Him.”

Look at **2 Cor. 5:21**

21 He made Him who [knew] no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

As we examine justification and the imputation of righteousness because we are in Christ, this is a significant text. In the context the death of Jesus on the cross (5:14-15) “he died for all” - is what drives Paul to proclaim Christ. The death of Christ is what happened when He was made to be sin on our behalf. The death of Christ places us “in Him” and if this is the case we are a new creation (5:17). This new creation then links to verse 21 - we are the “righteousness of God in Him.” This applies to all of those who are “in Him.” Verse 18 and 19 speaks of God’s reconciliation of us to Himself and “in Christ” our trespasses are not counted against us - how? This is explained in verse 21.

God made Christ (who knew no sin) to be sin . . . on our behalf . . .

so that

We might become the righteousness of Godin Him

Christ “was made to be sin” - this is the imputation of our sins to Christ. He was sinless, but the reckoning of or sins to Him means he suffers the penalty. Then the second half refers to us being imputed the righteousness of Christ, this is why we are justified.

BACK TO OUR TEXT:

Gal 2:15-21:

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.”

Perhaps now with you understanding of justification and imputation you can understand this text, as this is the central idea of this text and this is the main point here because this was exactly what the **false teachers** and all false teachers after them seek to attack and distort placing their followers in bondage.

Note that the text before this text (2:10-14) is issue of Peter’s table etiquette, or table fellowship in Antioch. You might say; “Hey surely you can pick and choose who to eat with?”

Answer sure you can! But that is not the issue in **Gal 2:10-14**. The issue is Justification by Faith Alone, not whose table has the tastiest food!

11 But when Cephas **came** to Antioch, I **opposed** him to his face, because **[he]** stood condemned. **12** For prior to the **coming** of certain men from James, he used to **eat** with the Gentiles; but when they **came**, he *began* to **withdraw** and

hold himself aloof, [fearing] the party of the circumcision. **13** The rest of the Jews **joined** him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was **carried** away by their hypocrisy. **14** But when I **saw** that they were not **straightforward** about the truth of the gospel, I **said** to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, [being] a Jew, **live** like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you **compel** the Gentiles to **live** like Jews?"

Peter was confronted by Paul because he succumbed to the fear of man (12) and as a result **acted in such a way as a leader** that he was not cutting it straight with the Gospel (14). Peter use to eat with Gentile Christians all the time. But then he broke fellowship with them. The false teachers" from James" manipulated Peter, adamantly holding to Jewish dietary customs as a means of being acceptable or keeping acceptable before God and Christ.

This was the core of Paul's accusation against Peter:

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**.

This is not being straightforward with the truth of the Gospel. In other words: "Peter you are a leader you are not living out the Gospel you know to be true." Jews like Peter, Barnabus and Paul even though are separated from Gentiles in their Jewishness, now knew that any human, regardless of ethnicity is **not justified** by works of the law, but justification is appropriated through faith, and faith alone. It is faith alone "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!

In **verse 17** it would appear that the claim of the false teachers and accusation against Paul is that if justification is by faith alone apart from law, do you not Paul, then make yourself a Gentile sinner? And then effectively make Christ a minister of sin? As now there is no longer any need for law-abiding people?

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.

Verse 18 & 19 Paul counters this by saying - If I add law to justification I do not become righteous, I will simply prove to be a law breaker as before, because the law showed Paul he has to die to human effort in keeping it. He could not meet its requirements. In dying to law he found grace in Christ. Now he does not respond to the law for the purpose of justification (unlike Peter's bad example in Antioch). Now he is free to truly 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."

Verse 20-1 - "I have been crucified with Christ" - possibly one of the most profound statements from Paul and should be the assessment of every true believer!

The life Paul lives now is internally determined by Christ who lives in him, motivated by faith in Christ who paid the penalty in Paul's place, his substitutionary sacrifice (note "gave Himself up for me."). To rebuild the law again and live in any way small or big, motivated by works of the law to establish righteousness, would in fact therefore make Paul the true lawbreaker. What motivates your Christian walk?

The Judaizers cancel out grace, and Peter's following of them - were in fact nullifying the grace of God! That came through the death of Christ, not law-keeping. To show others (as Peter had started to do) that justification comes through law keeping is to render the death of Christ useless.

7. Back to Where We Started: Defining Justification

I think after our excursion through Romans and Galatians we can conclude then that justification refers to that action by God toward the sinner whereby he is declared by God to be right with Him solely on the basis of the substitutionary sacrifice accomplished by Jesus Christ on his behalf, on the Cross. It refers to a permanent legal action by the omniscient God, by which He declares a person just in His sight which changes the status of a person before His presence, not changing the person himself.

Justification and Sanctification are both part of salvation. Both are a work of God's grace and all who are justified will be sanctified. Yet justification and sanctification must be separated to avoid major error. The error is the the ground upon which all the work of God rests - the sacrificial death of Jesus on Calvary will be confused with the experience of being conformed to the image of Christ over time.

Romans 5:1 - Paul will use different tenses to show this difference: "Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ."

Peace with God comes from God's gracious declaration not any human works or religious effort on our behalf.

Louis Berkhof says:

"**Justification** removes the guilt of sin and restores the sinner to all the filial rights involved in his state as a child of God, including an eternal inheritance. Sanctification removes the pollution of sin and renews the sinner ever-increasingly in

conformity with the image of God. Justification takes place outside the sinner in the tribunal of God, and does not change his inner life, though the sentence is brought home to him subjectively. Sanctification, on the other hand, takes place in the inner life of the man and gradually affects his whole being.” (Berkhof, L, Systematic Theology, 511)

Richard Hooker (1554-1600) made this profound statement regarding **righteousness and justification**:

“There is a glorifying righteousness of men in the world to come; as there is a justifying and sanctifying righteousness here. The righteousness, wherewith we shall be clothed in the world to come, is both perfect and inherent. That whereby here we are justified is perfect, but not inherent. That whereby we are sanctified, inherent, but not perfect.” (The Ecclesiastical Polity and Other Works of Richard Hooker).

SESSION 2

5. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH AND THE OTHER FACETS OF THE DIAMOND

Here I propose to show you, very briefly, how JBFA is related (and inseparable) to a few other aspects of salvation such as the Spirit, Faith and Works.

There are the other sides of the multifaceted diamond of salvation. For example predestination, calling, sanctification and glorification these are important and a study of these would be a blessing and very fruitful, but for the sake of time I think these ones below are often confused by false teaching.

1. The Relationship Between Justification and the Spirit

Sometimes in some Charismatic sections of the church the work of the Spirit is confused and separated from Justification. This is not evident in Paul's words to the Galatians.

3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has **bewitched** you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was **publicly** portrayed *as [crucified]*?

2 This is the only thing I **want to find** out from you: did you **receive** the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

3 **Are** you so foolish? Having **[begun]** by the Spirit, are you now being **perfected** by the flesh?

4 Did you **suffer** so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain?

5 So then, does He who **[provides]** you with the Spirit and **[works]** miracles among you, do it by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?

If you understand the meaning and definition of justification from the previous section, you may then now understand why Paul uses strong words here in **Galatians 3:1**.

Rhetorically, Paul is seeking to shock them out of their magical fascination with the false teachers, and asks them to remember when they were saved! Obviously then he is asking them to remember something that happened experientially. There was an internal change in their belief, faith was placed in Christ and the Cross, mindset changed and actions even to the extent that there was persecution (since they suffered many things).

How were they saved? Did they experience the Spirit through works of the law or by hearing with faith? This is a direct reference to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that happens to all believers when they are saved. The text clearly implies that they received the Spirit when they were justified. Or, you could translate this: “in believing what you heard you received the Spirit.”

This is not the same divine action as justification, justification is a declaration by God, it happens outside the person, the actual divine action by is not something you “experientially feel.” But from Chapter 2 & 3 being justified implies the concurrent indwelling of the Spirit, divinely initiated, they cannot be separated, there is no delay, this is what Paul is asking them to remember. When the Galatians heard the Gospel they believed and received the Spirit. This happened at the same time - Paul states this as an absolute fact. Case in point: receiving the Spirit was not by doing some sort of human exercise but instantly “by hearing with faith.”

This is again mentioned by Paul to the **Ephesians 1:13-14**: “In Him, you also, after [listening] to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also [believed], you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God's own possession, to the praise of His glory.”

Now look at **Galatians 3:3** and here is the point flowing from the previous section dealing with justification :If you have received the Spirit, Paul goes on to ask another rhetorical question which points to their wrong understanding: “Are you now being perfected by the flesh?”

These two aspects justification and receiving the Spirit reflects the completed work of God in saving. False teachers would love you to think that justification is somehow incomplete. Clearly from this verse there are not two or more stages to justification or receiving a “more complete Spirit.” There is no initial justification and then a final justification that is a joint effort of God and co-operative human beings. If you are justified by God you have the Spirit, if you have the Spirit, there is no need for human works (“flesh”) to seal and complete this. The Holy Spirit is by whom we are “sealed for the day of redemption” (Eph 4:30).

This is not to deny the further ongoing work of the indwelling Spirit in our lives this is called “sanctification” (Gal 5:16ff; Eph 4:1ff) conforming us internally into the likeness of Christ. But the point for Paul here is it begins and ends with God - God graciously supplies the Spirit (3:2-6) as he supplies justification (2:15-21)!

Can you think back to your salvation? Was it works, or was it “by hearing with faith?”

2. The Relationship Between Justification and Faith

Galatians 3:6 is Paul's first argument from Gen 15:6 - “Abraham believed God.” Introduced here to counter the false ideas is the relationship between justification and faith, since it is those “who are of faith” who are true sons of Abraham, not those who work at works!

Read 3:6-14

6 Even so Abraham **believed** God, and it was **reckoned** to him as righteousness.⁷ Therefore, >>**be**<< sure that it is those who are of faith who **are** sons of Abraham. 8 The Scripture, [**foreseeing**] that God would **justify** the Gentiles by faith, **preached** the gospel beforehand to Abraham, *saying*, “All the nations will be **blessed** in you.” 9 So then those who are of faith are **blessed** with Abraham, the believer. 10 For as many as **are** of the works of the Law **are** under a curse; for it is **written**, “Cursed is everyone who does not **abide** by all things [**written**] in the book of the law, to **perform** them.” 11 Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, “The righteous man shall **live** by faith.” 12 However, the Law **is** not of faith; on the contrary, “He who [**practices**] them shall **live** by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having [**become**] a curse for us—for it is **written**, “Cursed is everyone who [**hangs**] on a tree”—14 in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might **come** to the Gentiles, so that we would **receive** the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Can you see that a contrast is set up between works of the law and faith in this section? What does that mean? Faith is not a work. Yet you can also see here that faith is still something that pertains to the believer, he possesses this faith, he has to exercise this faith. Man simply believes, Abraham is the example of this.

Some may be able to have a mindset that anyone can have faith. People “have faith” in created objects, false gods or other men, for example you may hear: “I have faith that this doctor will heal me.” But the faith here in Galatians is not something that all men naturally possesses in their humanness and without this kind of faith, men can never please God. Romans 1 makes that very clear. Rom 8:7-8 says:

“ 7 because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the law of God, for it is not even able to do so, 8 and those who [are] in the flesh cannot please God.”

Scripture is clear then that this special faith comes from God. God gives this faith in Christ to every believer. The believer then is capable of exercising faith.

Faith is like a unique muscle in the body. You did not make it, you cannot create it. It is there because God gives it. A muscle used correctly grows and strengthens. Ultimately, you can never claim you are responsible for the growth. Yet, faith exercised in the correct object - Jesus Christ - conforms you to His image.

a) It is Spirit Empowered Faith. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, **faithfulness** (Gal 5:22).

b) It is Gracious Faith. the Lord’s grace **brings faith** see 1 Tim 1:14. Paul saw the change in the Philippians lives and said: “For it has been granted to you not only to believe in Christ ...” (Phil 1:29).

c) It is Divinely Initiated Faith - the writer of Hebrews knew this well; that Jesus is the **author** and perfecter (finisher) of this kind of faith. “[**Fixing**] our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith,” (Heb 12:2)

Eph 2:8-9- “For by grace you have been saved through faith and this not of yourselves it is the gift of God.”

d) It is Meritless Faith. Although Peter made some errors out of fear of man in Antioch, he also understood this:

2 Pe 1:1 Simon Peter, a bond-servant and apostle of Jesus Christ, **To those who have [received] a faith** of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ:

e) It is Instrumental Faith by which God’s Righteousness is Reckoned to us.

Romans 3:25-6

25 whom God **displayed** publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was to demonstrate His righteousness*, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins [**previously**] committed; 26 for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, so that He would **be just and the [justifier] of the one who has faith in Jesus**.

Here Paul says in the death of Christ on the Cross, by God’s initiative, His righteousness, His very character, is made clear to all in the Cross. Whereas prior to the Cross it was not fully revealed why there restraint - “the forbearance of God as it appeared that He passed over the sins previously committed.” Now in the present it is made very clear, His purposes never changed. In the Cross, His justice is displayed and at the same his justification of sinners. These are the sinners who have faith in Jesus. Faith is the instrument by which the righteousness of God comes to every believer, there are not two kinds of justification, law derived and faith derived. Faith is alone, it is expressed in what God has done. It has always been that way, Abraham was the example of the man of faith.

The amazing conclusion: “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.”

Galatians 2:16

... 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**.

Luther in his commentary said of this verse: “the Christ who is grasped by faith and who lives in the heart is the true Christian righteousness, on account of which God counts us righteous and grants us eternal life.”

Do you now understand that a person is “Justified by Faith Alone?”

3. The Relationship Between Justification and Works

Any kind of religious works, whether they be “works of the law” or - this may come as a shock to you - as a Christian in the church - church attendance, regular quiet times, Bible reading, helping the sick and the poor, ministering to the needy, none of these justify you. Or perhaps you say “I must strive to keep the Ten Commandments because that keeps me saved not that I am saved.” Not one of these things grants you salvation before God or is even meritorious keeping you saved, or somehow places you in a better standing before God than the next struggling Christian, so that you are a cut above the rest, working your way to higher sainthood.

The Galatians started by grace and like we could be, were in the danger of using religious works like law to achieve a better status before God. You might well ask then: “What then is the point of law?” Good question! It is important to know this as false teachers use law to place believers in bondage again.

In **Galatians 3:15** Paul explains the Purpose of the Law and the danger of placing yourself under this again. There is no time to go through all that here but look at the key section **Galatians 3:22-24**:

22 But the Scripture has **shut** up everyone under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be **given** to those who [**believe**].

23 But before faith **came**, we were **kept** in custody under the law, being [**shut**] up to the faith which [**was**] later to be **revealed**.

24 Therefore the Law has **become** our tutor *to lead us* to Christ, so that we may be **justified** by faith.

Yes the law is holy and is good, it reflects the character of God. However the law’s purpose was to show and highlight and make very clear, that everyone (Jew and Gentile - as it is written on their hearts) are trapped and in bondage to sin. The requirements of the law cannot be humanly met - everyone under law is under a curse.

James 2:10 For as many as **are** of the works of the Law **are** under a curse; for it is **written**, “Cursed is everyone who does not **abide** by all things [**written**] in the book of the law, to **perform** them.”

So the law then was like a tutor training a child to lead him to maturity. The law points to our need to faith in Christ so that we may be justified by faith alone. When you are faced with the law and you see the absolute holiness of God, it drives you to the Cross of Christ! So it is Scripture that shows that faith is what leads us to Christ and righteousness.

From Galatians 5 Paul explains what deliverance from the law, Christian grace-living, looks like and warns them not to fall from grace and using religious rules and exercises and works to make one meritorious and justified before God. It must be faith working through love: Gal 5:3-6:

3 And I **testify** again to every man who [**receives**] circumcision, that he **is** under obligation to **keep** the whole Law. **4** You have been **severed** from Christ, you who are seeking to be **justified** by law; you have **fallen** from grace. **5** For we through the Spirit, by faith, are **waiting** for the hope of righteousness. **6** For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision **means** anything, but faith [**working**] through love.

In **Galatians 5:6** we see the contention that “faith working through love” avails everything - including justification!

Here is where faith and works are meaningful. The word “working” in this section is in the Greek middle voice. All that means is that there is no subject doing this action (working), and there appears to be no object receiving this “working”, so it means “become effective.” So you can translate this: “Faith becoming effective through love.”

The closest parallel here is James 5:16 “The [effective] prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.” You can translate this: “The prayer of a righteous man, becoming effective, avails much.” In other words, prayer had the effect of producing drought and rain.

This is how faith works - faith produces love. What is this love? The love you can see - love is self sacrificial acts of service to others. So justifying faith in a person is the kind of faith that motivates and energizes loving acts of service in believers. So then it is clear here that works are not the instrument of justification and through works we do not appropriate God’s righteousness, that is putting the wrong cart before the wrong horse. But what this text says that divine faith given to the believer is the only instrument by which we appropriate justification, is not on its own. It inevitably brings forth works of love.

1 Tim 1:5-11 Paul says to Timothy and all those who would lead in ministry: “the aim of our charge (or the goal of our instruction) is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

Love flows from a transformed heart and conscience and sincere faith. You want your people your family to minister works of love? Then preach the Gospel - it will transform the heart!

But note **1 Tim 1:6-7** right after this context: “For some men, [straying] from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, [wanting] to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not [understand] either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.”

The error so often made in churches is that men teach law. So it is no surprise when they neglect matters of heart, conscience and faith, love then is motivated by guilt, duty and fear of men. We bear works of love by being in Christ, joined through faith, not through law.

Does your relationship with Christ, your trust in His gracious and completed work on the Cross, on your behalf motivate you to love, even at great cost to yourself?

SESSION 2

6. JBFA & MODERN FALSE TEACHING

Distortions of Justification by Faith Alone

A. ROMAN CATHOLIC DOCTRINE

It is important that in the light of many efforts to bring catholic and evangelicals together that we understand the issues surrounding justification by faith alone. To come together blindly for the sake of “unity” is to destroy the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone, and therefore destroy the Gospel of Christ.

If Paul calls down an anathema on those that would lead others astray by adding and/or changing the Gospel, should we be any less passionate? Anyone who teaches “truth” that is contrary to the Gospel, is not cutting it straight with the Scripture. The correct response is not to move away from doctrine and truth for the sake of unity, but confrontation, warning and hopefully restoration to Biblical truth. For evangelical leaders in anyway to compromise this issue is to be like Peter in Galatians Chapter 2:11-21 and lead others astray by hypocrisy.

Having said this though, we ought to acknowledge that as evangelical Christians we must show love to Catholics for the sake of Christ. Some of us are saved out of this background and many Catholics are still in our families. Many of them have not even heard of these distinctions about justification by faith let alone the true Gospel of Christ. It is not loving to water down the Gospel, allowing a person to march deluded into hell. Love includes sharing the truth of justification by faith alone clearly with them as well, no matter the personal cost to us.

It may be surprising to you, but Roman Catholics use much of the same terminology evangelicals do today. They also refer to justification by faith. An examination of their official documents will reveal this (New Catechism, see also Canons and Decrees of the Council of Trent: H.J. Shroeder, 1941 and Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994).

“Justification is conferred at Baptism, the sacrament of faith. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who makes us inwardly just by the power of his mercy. Justification has been merited for us by the Passion of Christ. It is granted through Baptism. It conforms us to the righteousness of God, who justifies us. It has for its goal the glory of God and of Christ, and the gift of eternal life. It is the most excellent work of God’s mercy.”

Roman Catholic (RC) doctrine acknowledges grace, faith, the righteousness of God even all for His glory! Also RC doctrine goes so far as to acknowledge forensic justification, that God declares a person just. But beware, the meanings attached to these terms differ vastly from a Biblical understanding. So a close examination of these words in their understanding is necessary.

For RC doctrine “justify” means “to make just” (Latin influence) but God only declares just those who are already just in themselves. How did they become just? For RC doctrine this happens at baptism, where justification is graciously poured into or infused into the person undergoing baptism. In baptism the person is cleansed of original sin, put into a (non-permanent) state of grace and sacramentally regenerated. This justification then conforms the baptized person to God’s righteousness. Righteousness then is intrinsically part of the person by infusion, it inheres in the person. RC believers must therefore cooperate with and assent to grace to the extent that this righteousness becomes inherent in them.

Biblically the instrumental cause of justification is faith and faith alone, not baptism. A plant grows by receiving nutrients. The nutrients travel through many veins, without the transport system of veins the plant cannot grow. The veins are not the cause of the growth, likewise faith is not the ground for justification but the means by which we appropriate it. By faith Christ’s righteousness is reckoned or imputed to us and His righteousness is the only and sufficient ground for justification. We are justified by grace alone through faith alone because of Christ alone. This faith is not a meritorious work, it is granted to us as a gift (Eph 2:8-9) wrought in us by the Holy Spirit.

Like Biblical doctrine, RC doctrine also deems “faith” as necessary. To understand how they view faith let us think of oxygen. You know that oxygen is a necessary condition for a fire, it needs to be present. However oxygen is not a sufficient condition for fire. If you had oxygen completely on its own with nothing else, it does not burn in and of itself, therefore we say it is not a sufficient condition for fire. RC doctrine says that faith is a necessary condition for justification. You can therefore even have faith and not be justified. You see this come through in their teaching on “mortal sin” where they claim with certain of these sins justification is lost.

Therefore in RC doctrine, faith is not a sufficient condition for justification. Evangelical doctrine on the other hand says that the Scripture teaches that it is faith alone, faith is indeed a sufficient condition for justification.

Now the biggest spin off with this RC doctrine is that in their teaching, the grace of justification can be reduced and even lost. Would this mean the person must be re-baptized to infuse more justification? According to them, this cannot happen, but the RC doctrine of “penance” comes into play. Penance is another means of infusing lost justification. It was this issue of penance that was the catalyst that ignited the Reformation.

Penance involves several actions, a couple of which may even sound Biblical, but the bottom line is that the sinner must do necessary works of satisfaction and through these works he gains merit which is good enough to oblige God to infuse a persons lost justification.

The terms “infusion” and “imputation” also show a fundamental difference. Imputation is an action by God which “counts” or “reckons” us just. This is a banking or accounting term. God legally places the righteousness of Christ to our account. In effect

there is a double imputation because at the same time our sins are reckoned to Christ's account (2 Cor 5:21). Infusion on the other hand is something that is "poured in", it is part of or inherent in the person. It is that person's righteousness. However, imputation always implies an alien righteousness, the righteousness of another.

Therefore it follows that in RC justification a person is declared "just" by God because the person himself is found to be just. But in evangelical doctrine, God declares a person just based on nothing in the person but based on something that was added, the counting of the righteousness of Christ to that person. In this transaction also, God counts our sin to the account of Christ.

Contrary to this, Biblical doctrine teaches that the work of Christ and his saving work of Him on the cross is sufficient and freely applied to the sinner by faith alone. The perfect obedience of Christ fulfills all God's requirements for righteousness, earning all the merit necessary to save and save completely, the believer. Nothing can be added or in some way supplement Christ's righteousness to add to its value. In RC teaching justification is faith plus works and grace plus merit and justification is initially given through the sacrament of baptism.

It should not be surprising then that the evangelical doctrine of "justification by faith alone" is in their documents (coming out of the Council of Trent) - anathematized and called a false gospel.

SESSION 2

5. JBFA & MODERN FALSE TEACHING

Distortions of Justification by Faith Alone

B. "EVANGELICAL" DISTORTIONS

Probably one of the most subtle attacks against JBFA comes from within the so called evangelical camp! Nicholas Thomas Wright now 66 years old, a very influential British NT scholar and the former Anglican Bishop of Durham, England has produced much material on his new understanding of Justification by Faith Alone. (For example see: "What Saint Paul Really Said" Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1997 and 'New Perspectives on Paul' in "Justification in Perspective: Historical Developments and Contemporary Challenges," ed. Bruce McCormack. Grand Rapids MI: 2006) (Also found at ntwrightpage.com).

The material on this is voluminous and for the purposes of this seminar I cannot do adequate justice to the issue in the time we have, other than make a small, but hopefully accurate attempt to summarize the data from several books and show you why indeed this is a threat to the bedrock of the Gospel.

1. Where it Started

First, just to let you know that this did not start with N.T. Wright. Thirty eight years ago Krister Stendahl argued in two lectures in 1976 from his books, ("The Apostle Paul and the Introspective Conscience of the West" in 'Paul Among the Jews and Other Essays,' Phil: fortress Press), that the church's understanding of Paul was wrongly influenced by Augustine and later by Luther. He argued that JBFA flowed from Augustine and Luther more than it did from Paul. Stendahl examined Acts 9 and concluded that Paul was not "converted" here but what he says received "a call." This call was to preach to the Gentiles because the main issue was not salvation, but who belongs to the people of God. This moved **justification** from a matter of soteriology (salvation) to ecclesiology (church).

2. The NPP Development

Historically, the reformers and the church had viewed Paul as opposing Judaism as a religion of works. These works were done to make one acceptable before God. Following after Stendahl's idea what is termed the "New Perspective on Paul" (NPP) started to grow with later writers such as E.P. Sanders (Paul and Palestinian Judaism, 1977). This was further critiqued and developed by J. Dunn ("The New Perspective on Paul" in Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester 65 (1983). The main thesis was that Judaism was a religion of grace not works. Obedience to the law was only a means of maintaining or staying in the covenant. This they claimed to arrive at by an examination extra-biblical texts on first century Judaism. Despite Biblical evidence to the contrary, this means, in their estimation, Paul was never opposing Judaism in his letters. Dunn developed the idea (especially from Galatians) that Paul was simply opposing certain Jews who were made "ethnic marks or badges" as the criteria for being part of the people of God. Ethnic badges were actions such as circumcision, abstaining from certain foods and Sabbath rules. So in reality the "works of the law" that Paul is opposed to are these ethnic marks, they were nothing to do with wholesale human effort in keeping the law to be acceptable before God.

So what? Well here's the problem -The problem with this NPP teaching then is that it claimed that the justification that Paul was speaking about in Romans and Galatians is nothing to do with a declaration of how one ENTERS the people of God, it is a declaration of how a person is ALREADY a member of the people of God. (Sounds very similar to RC teaching). What is justification then? They would say it is an act of God but it includes the inward change in the believer and it follows then that it is not by faith alone but a persons faith and works are significant in this transformation.

Sanders and Dunn are very mistaken in their original premise to think that Judaism was a thoroughly gracious religion. You can simply illustrate this from the parable of Jesus about the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18:9. Here are two people praying to God. The Jewish religious expert and a Jewish tax collector. The Pharisee prays and says; "God, I thank you I am not like other men: extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector." With the words "God thank you..." he at least acknowledges the sovereignty of God in his life, yet this is not relevant to the verdict that is pronounced on him by Jesus - "I tell you this man (tax collector) went to his house justified rather than the other (Pharisee)...." (Luk 18:14). This is clearly the pattern of Judaism in Jesus' and Paul's day. The Pharisee looked not to his ethnic badges but in general to his works to make him acceptable before God.

3. Wright or wrong on Justification ?

Then enters Bishop N.T. Wright. He continued to develop these ideas from Sanders and Dunn, not agreeing with them on all points, but he did say: "The discussion of justification in much of history of the church, certainly since Augustine, got off on the wrong foot -at least in terms of understanding Paul- they have stayed there ever since," (What Saint Paul Really Said. Grand Rapids, MI Eerdmans, 1997). This is certainly quite a claim that that the church, especially the Reformers have been wrong on Paul for nearly 500 years and now N.T. Wright is the only one right!

So how did NT Wright develop his view on justification? Well, he claimed that the overarching theme of Scripture and for understanding Paul is "God's covenant with Israel." So therefore in his exegesis he says justification should be defined as the declaration that a person is "already in the covenant family."

For Wright the Gospel does not answer the question of the guilty sinner, how I can find favor with God? But it answers the question who is Lord? (*What Saint Paul Really Said*, 45). In other words the Gospel is not how a person gets saved (aka

Soteriology), but the proclamation that Jesus is Lord which works to bring people into the family of Abraham (aka Ecclesiology).

This may sound sort of ok, indeed a little confusing (remember the Galatians confusion?) to you, but what Wright means is that “justification” is about the process of coming to faith and staying in the church. Firstly, Wright proposes that God “calls” a person, placing them in the covenant people and then after that justification (legal concept for him as well) acknowledges that they are already part of the covenant people of God.

Now I would think that you would have some warning bells going off in your head if you have read through the epistles of Paul, because his use of the terminology of Paul and of salvation sounds confusing and you would be right because this meaning of “justification” is simply not in Paul’s letters.

Doing a word study on “justify” as we did, shows that it means simply “declare right.” The term shows up in Scripture in simple court room scenes (Deut 25:1; 1 Ki 8:32). It refers to vindication (Job 33:32), wrongful vindication (Is 5:23), God being vindicated (Mat 11:19; Lu 7:29), man avoiding shame (Lu 10:29). It appears as a present reality in a one time event. For example in Romans 3:4 and 1 Tim 3:16 the Greek word “justify” does not have anything to do with covenant membership but rather simply to mean “declared right or innocent, vindicated,” (look also at Rom 3:28 with Rom 4:6 and the word “reckon”). God does something that affects his standing before Him. He counts them as perfectly fulfilling all His requirements. Therefore, the correct understanding of Paul and Scripture is that justification is the single act initiated solely by God on an unbeliever without which a person cannot be a member of the people of God. Justification as understood by Paul is a once-for-all divinely decisive event - see Rom 5:1. “Therefore since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” The peace with God is a fact and established because of the event of justification. Then to use Wright’s terminology justification makes “covenant membership” possible it has nothing to do with declaring a person is already a “covenant member.”

4. Wright or wrong on Imputation?

Now this part is very difficult to explain, but Wright’s view on justification leads him to say that the idea of imputation, (fundamental to the doctrine of justification - Christ’s righteousness is counted (imputed) to us and our sin is counted (imputed) to Christ e.g. 2 Cor 5:21), that which the evangelical church has held onto since the Reformation, is a mistake, or in his words a “category mistake” (in “What Paul Really Said,” 98-99). Therefore, the debate between Catholics and Evangelicals on justification on the basis of what Wright says is really unnecessary!

How on earth does Wright get to this disturbing position?

Besides doubtful exegesis in Romans (4:3-8; 5:18-19) and Galatians, his exegesis of 2 Cor 5:21 is actually a “mistake.” This you can argue is the most compelling verse for imputation of Christ’s righteousness to believers because of their union with Christ.

In his article in “On Becoming the Righteousness of God” (in Pauline Theology II 1 & 2 Corinthians, David Hay Fortress 1993), Wright says the “righteousness of God” means “the covenant-faithfulness of God” not as the text says the “righteousness of God” in other words His moral character. So he reads 2 Cor 5:21 as: “He made Him who [knew] no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the COVENANT FAITHFULNESS...” Wright says that this verse tells us that the believer is made an *ambassador or representative of God*, being the living embodiment of Christ in covenantal faithfulness. God’s righteousness is therefore, in Wright’s interpretation, the ACTION of God, not His fundamental attribute of being. With his re-definition of God’s righteousness, imputation is then a “category mistake” because the “righteousness of God” cannot be a righteousness from God that changes a humans status through faith.

Now you can look through several good evangelical commentaries on this verse and Wright’s is the most strange you will find! If you examine the context of 2 Cor 5:21 it is the death of Christ that underlies all Paul does (5:14) not “covenantal faithfulness.” It is Christ’s death that one has died for all, therefore all died. So verse 21 is inextricably linked to Christ’s death - this is basis of imputation, when he died, we died in Him, my sin was made his sin on the cross. We live because His life was made my life, His righteousness was made my righteousness, not my own but his.

Wright really distorts the terminology to attempt to show that “the righteousness of God” is not who He is (attribute), but His “covenantal faithfulness” in other words what He does (action). Even in 2 Cor 5:21 you see God’s righteousness is certainly the opposite of the state of sin!

Undertake a short Biblical study of the “righteousness of God” yourself and see what you find! You will find that Wright has no basis for stating that the “righteousness of God” is “technically the covenantal faithfulness of God.” Even in the recognized scholarly lexicon BDAG four pages are dedicated to the righteousness word group and nothing relates to “covenantal faithfulness.” It would appear that Wright has made the “category mistake.”

God righteousness is related to His glory (Rom 3:5+3:7; 3:23). We are all required to have it (Rom 1:21). It is inseparably who God is and causes Him to do right in all His ways (Ps145:17). He will judge the world in righteousness (Ps 98:9) and in judgement contexts God’s righteousness is linked to his name (Ps 143:11; Ezek 36:20-23) and His glory (Is 48:9-11).

Grudem says: “God’s righteousness means that God always acts in accordance with what is right and is himself the final standard of what is right.” (Systematic Theology, 203). Piper defines God’s righteousness as; “His commitment to do what is

right...God's unwavering allegiance to Himself...His unswerving commitment to uphold the worth of His glory" (The Future of Justification, 164). Both see "the righteousness of God" as a fundamental attribute of His character.

5. Wright or wrong preaching?

The NPP and Wright's error on justification has largely been confined to academic circles for many years and was not the concern for the man or woman in the pew. But what began as an academic debate is now seeping into churches and will lead to heretical preaching (my term, but see Piper, *Future of Justification* on Wright's preaching on 1 Thessalonians).

Preaching from passages in Romans and even Galatians attempting to show that to "justify" is about God's covenantal faithfulness where God declares someone already a believer, "just" on the basis of his whole life, will say it has little to do with Jesus on the Cross. This preaching will show that for Paul, his joy and his crown was not that "He died, that I may live" but the churches that Paul has planted that remain faithful to the Gospel.

Granted, the churches in Paul's ministry may well be the evidence of a fruitful ministry that Paul has had, but I now way does the Scripture show that these "trophy of ministry" in some way add to our final justification and therefore we escape the wrath that is to come.

Paul's crown of boasting in 1 Thess 2:19 is read with Galatians 6:14 and in other places where he uses this term. It is boasting in the cross. This is how they were saved.

Wright's teaching obscure the Gospel in a similar way the Judaizers did in Galatia, to the extent it results in another Gospel, which is in fact not a Gospel at all. Paul says in Galatians 5:1 "if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you." If you preach as justification with no imputation then we say God is comfortable with injustice and we have no righteousness before God either.

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7. CONCLUSION

False teachers are not really any different today. The doctrine of Justification by Faith alone and the imputation of Christ's righteousness is still a target for false teachers to threaten the bedrock of the Gospel by introducing confusing ideas and imprecise theology. The key issue is always the correct exegesis and interpretation of critical passages. NPP advocates today say the Reformers distorted Paul by seeing his background as Jewish legalism and works justification. So they say the Reformers corrupted the Scripture but they, on the other hand, have the right interpretation. Interestingly enough, their tactics are no different from the Judaizers in Paul's day.

Justification by Faith Alone - *articula stantis et cadentis ecclesiae* - the article on which the church stands or falls. Do you stand here as well?

A Practical Exhortation

Therefore, having been justified by faith (alone), we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand; and we exult in the hope of the glory of God. And not only this, but we also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings perseverance; and perseverance, proven character; and proven character, hope and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given us. (Rom 5:1-5)

This is Paul's "therefore" after describing Justification by Faith Alone for 4 chapters! It is not a dry doctrine that stays in the cold corridors of seminaries and academic institutions! It is so wonderful and liberating that because of justification by faith you and I can EXULT God, even in the face of any GREAT TRIAL, because we have purpose and AMAZING HOPE which will never disappoint, as the HOLY SPIRIT fills us to overflowing the experience and knowledge of LOVE OF GOD!

If any of you are a parent here today and have unsaved children or have any unsaved family members, what a joy and a freedom it is to know that God justifies the ungodly! In spite of all our efforts as parents our children end up as wayward, yet we have hope because of this doctrine. Christ is willing and able to be their righteousness - no matter what he or she has done! We persevere in prayer and hope for our children and loved ones because righteousness is from Christ.

Justification by Faith Alone shows us that we need doctrinal instruction when it comes to church planting. We need trained men to lead churches. The Great Commission is to be "teaching" them to observe "all" that Jesus commanded. Paul spent years in Ephesus teaching them. Evangelization on its own will fail within one generation, it needs to be backed up with solid doctrinal understanding through generational teaching as ignorance will produce weak and man-dependent churches that are traditional, legalistic and cultic filled with people in bondage unable to see the relevance of the Bible and the joyful freedom of Christ-centered truth.

Justification by Faith Alone is a transcendent truth, in the sense it transcends barriers in culture and tradition, it is not an ethnic Jewish concept, it connects the whole human history, connecting Adam with Christ (Rom 5:18-21). It is for the offspring of Adam - it is for everyone. This then must become the motivation for all missions, all church planting and the motivation of why this day, a sinner like you and me, should live with great praise and JOY taking the message to all people to tell them of an alien righteousness from the lamb of God for all those who believe in Him by faith!

No condemnation now I dread

Jesus, and all in him, is mine!

Alive in him, my living head,

And clothed in righteousness divine,

Bold I approach the eternal throne,

And claim the crown through Christ my own.

(Hymn "And Can it Be" by Charles Wesley)

SOLA FIDE

Further Reading mostly listed in Piper, John (2002-11-15). *Counted Righteous in Christ: Should We Abandon the Imputation of Christ's Righteousness?*. Crossway.

John MacArthur - *Saved Without a Doubt* and also *The Gospel According to the Apostles*

R. C. Sproul, in his book *Getting the Gospel Right: The Tie that Binds Evangelicals Together* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1999) provides a helpful history and analysis of two documents regarding Evangelical and Catholic unity (“Evangelicals and Catholics Together” and “The Gift of Salvation”).

For another recent ecumenical document on justification, see *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, The Lutheran World Federation and the Roman Catholic Church (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2000).

For recent responses to the New Perspective on Paul — exemplified in various ways through the writings of E. P. Sanders, James D. G. Dunn, and N. T. Wright, and not treated here — see:

D. A. Carson, Peter T. O’Brien, and Mark A. Seifrid, *Justification and Variegated Nomism. Volume 1: The Complexities of Second Temple Judaism* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2001);

Donald A. Hagner, “Paul and Judaism: Testing the New Perspective,” in Peter Stuhlmacher, *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification: A Challenge to the New Perspective* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001); and

Seyoon Kim, *Paul and the New Perspective: Second Thoughts on the Origin of Paul’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001); and

Philip H. Eveson, *The Great Exchange: Justification by Faith Alone in the Light of Recent Thought* (Bromley, Kent: One Day Publications, 1996).

Readers should also be aware of Mark A. Seifrid’s *Christ, Our Righteousness: Paul’s Theology of Justification* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2001) and

Peter Stuhlmacher’s *Revisiting Paul’s Doctrine of Justification*.