

EVEN WE HAVE BELIEVED

Have you ever seen a criminal face to face? Have you looked into his eyes knowing exactly what the terrible crimes that he has committed are? Have you ever had to forgive that person of their crimes? You see, you and I, we are criminals. We have a case file that would put us away forever or have us given the death penalty. There are two people that will represent us. One will be automatically appointed if we don't request the other. The automatic appointee won't help your case...Oh, he may say that he is working in your best interest. But, while your standing before the judge, he will nail you to the wall with all the crimes you've committed. The judge, because He is just, will have to let the sentence be given to you for your crimes. However, if you ask for the other person to represent you, He will do quite the opposite of the other. What he requires of the criminal is total faith in Him. He is the best defense lawyer that has ever been. He also has connections with the Judge. In fact, the Judge made a deal with this lawyer. He said anyone that chose Him as their defense lawyer would be acquitted of their crimes: All their crimes! To understand the idea of justification by faith it is important to understand the idea of being a criminal and of having the defense that gets you acquitted.

Before delving into the content of the verse itself, let's look at what was happening at the time of book's writing. Paul, at the time of the book's writing was probably still a young man that was not thoroughly accepted. In Galatians, Paul is defending his apostleship.¹ Paul is also delivering a message that, to him, is for all mankind: Jew and Gentile alike. However certain people felt that everyone wanting to be a Christian must also follow the law even if they weren't Jewish.² These people, known as Judaizers, had come to the church that Paul was writing to and told them that they must fulfill the law to be a Christian. Paul being the easygoing person that he was let it go, right? Not exactly. In this letter to the Galatians, Paul establishes his authority as an apostle and the freedom and once-and-for-all-ness of Christ's work in what one commentator calls a "mountain torrent."³

Another point to consider in understanding Galatians 2:16 is the context of the passage. Chapter two begins with a discussion of Paul's personal acceptance by the apostles in Jerusalem as well as an acceptance of his message. He later tells of the confrontation that he has with Peter about being a hypocrite. It is this event that Paul uses as a springboard to discuss Christian liberty as a result of the atoning work of Christ.⁴ Verse fifteen leads into verse sixteen at which point we begin.

Paul, in verse sixteen, points out three times that justification does not come by works of the law or by observing the law. With these repetitions, Paul is telling all that looking to the law is leading in the wrong direction. The law was designed by God to hold the Jews over and to point them to the need for a final sacrifice for all sin. My mother often called the law the babysitter waiting for the parents to come home. I always thought that this was a very good illustration. For one, God knew that He needed to protect His children (the Jews) from bad influences. Because of this he gave them a list of rules to live by. These rules proved to be quite laborious. Just like when your parents used to leave a long list of instructions with the new babysitter because they couldn't be there in person, so God left His list. Just as when your parents return home the list of rules is thrown away, Jesus came to earth and the Law was no longer needed. Jesus did away with the letter of the Law by fulfilling it. Since the law is no longer needed we look to Jesus.

Our justification comes by faith in Jesus Christ. But what is justification? Justification is the "act of restoring people to their proper relationship with God."⁵ Other people have referred to it as a legal term that one is pronounced innocent. Both of these definitions shed light on the subject. Justification takes place at the time of salvation. It must take place at salvation because it is at

salvation that we put our faith in Christ. And it is at this point that He defends us before the Father and the Father pronounces us "acquitted."

Paul makes a smashing point against Peter in verse sixteen: "Even we have believed in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by faith in Christ..." In this statement, Paul reminds Peter that Jesus was the center of Christianity, not the law. He reminded him that Peter had not found the needed way to God in the Law. In this statement, Paul reminds Peter that the law didn't forgive him for denying Him, Jesus did. It was faith in Jesus that both Paul and Peter were justified by. It was this faith that changed their lives. With this statement Paul gave Peter a wakeup call. Those words probably echoed in Peter's ears for several hours as he pondered his actions and realigned his priorities. The question he was answering was not "Do I love Jesus and believe He is God?" His question was "Do I truly believe that His death was enough in itself?" If we don't believe that it was enough then by all means let's keep looking for the method to be counted innocent. If his death wasn't good enough then maybe we should try a bit of everything, just in case. If His death wasn't good enough, is there any hope? But if it was, it was the cure, the medicine. If it was good enough, it was the hope awaited for. If it was, we are innocent for the asking and the faith in Christ.

There are many people however who don't know that Jesus was really THE ONE. They are looking for a path to find the forgiveness and love that Jesus offers. They still have not asked for the defense lawyer that will get them the acquittal that they need. Instead they run from God thinking He is going to punish them. Some of those people may be your family. Some may be your friends. They are everywhere. And all they need is to put there faith in Christ. All they need is Jesus. Deep inside they are looking for a way to say, "Even we have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ that we might be justified by faith in Jesus Christ." My prayer for you today is to find those people searching for the way to justification and show them the way.