

# Galatians 2:11-21

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[ 0 : 01 ] There is, I think, a really simple logic to the reason why most people who don't believe! and trust in Jesus don't believe and trust in Jesus. Maybe that's you here this afternoon.

But the logic goes like this. I don't trust in Jesus because I don't need Jesus because I'm good enough. I don't trust in Jesus because I don't need Jesus because I'm good enough.

Zooming in on verse 15 to 21, Paul pictures that logic as if it were a building in our lives. A building built on self-sufficiency. The construction of this building is everything that you think you are and can do to impress God. You could call the building Project Me.

And Paul's job today is to demolish that building and cancel Project Me. It's what he talks about in verse 18, if you look there. If I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

He's saying that once upon a time I was working on Project Me, using God's laws to do this. But now Jesus has pulled the plug on that project. He has come with a wrecking ball and torn that down and I've now given up on that building. And it would be a real mistake to try and restart that project.

And he gives two main reasons why today. The first reason why is that you cannot do enough. You cannot do enough. And right away that is pretty provocative, isn't it? Because people do believe at heart that human beings are pretty much good people. We might make mistakes and there are some rotten exceptions to the rule. But generally, human beings are alright, aren't they? That's what we think about ourselves and about each other. But Paul says that is not what God thinks. Paul is saying you're not alright. Look at verse 15 and 16. We ourselves are Jews by birth and are not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law. Now hit the pause button there just for a moment. What does that mean? It means that no matter how good you are or how much good you do, you cannot be or do enough to be right with God. Project me is a non-starter. That word justification, it speaks of a judicial declaration by God over each person. It's his verdict of your life and of my life. And on God a good works alone, it will be a very, very boring courtroom drama because the verdict will be the same every single time. That verse, it means,

based on good works alone, there is no person who

[ 3 : 35 ] God would not reject. Notice three times in verse 16, he talks about works of the law, good works in a negative way, doesn't he. We are not justified by works of the law. Not by works of the law. By works of the law, no one will be justified. And it's utterly scandalous when you think about it.

Based on our good works and our efforts, not even the very best, not even the privileged Jews who know God's law. But if you're working on project me, if you're working on building a building, of building a tower, of trying harder, of doing your best, of self-motivated spirituality, the verdict will be the same regardless. Note the word, no one will be justified in verse 16. It's without exception, isn't it? On the basis of good works, Mother Teresa won't be justified. She hasn't done enough. Nelson Mandela won't be justified. He hasn't done enough, not half enough. Not even the apostle Paul will be justified. He hasn't done enough. He would have to reject you as much as he rejects me based on the works of the law, based on project me. It's irrespective of who you are and of what you've done. And if you really think about this, we know this, don't we? Notice the words that Paul uses in verse 16. We know that we are not justified by works of the law. We know that a person is not made right by works. He quotes from Psalm 143, which says,

And if we're honest, we echo that prayer. We don't want anyone to judge us, do we? Let alone God. Digging up our past, knowing our thought life, removing all privacy. If somebody could publish your life unedited onto Facebook, you would be horrified, wouldn't you? And before God, we'd be mortified, literally. In truth, we know this. We can't keep our own standards, let alone God's.

And we want to avoid judgment. Please don't enter into judgment with us. Because deep down, we know. We know. We know we can't stand up to it. We can't do it. And so Paul is saying, Galatians, what you are doing is absolutely futile if you're working on project me. We know this. Our lives are a

mess, and we've made a mess. We've hurt others, and we've been hurt by others. We've hurt God. Heaven would not be heaven with people like us there, would it? Deep down, we know it. That we can't do enough, and we're not good enough. You cannot do enough.

[ 7 : 12 ] But secondly, he says, Christ has done enough. Christ has done enough. Through the whole letter, there is a sharp contrast between two approaches to God.

Two ways of relating to him. And they're set up as opposites. One is project me. Trying to earn my way into God's good books. Paul calls that works of the law, doesn't he?

But the other way of relating to God is really bizarre. And it's in not doing anything at all. The other way of relating to God, he says, is to have faith in Jesus Christ, who died for us.

You'll notice in verse 16, just as many times as he says, it's not by works of the law. He balances that out and says, it is by trusting in Jesus. By having faith in Jesus.

And the reason? He goes on to explain that when a person trusts in Jesus, and his death and his resurrection, something really strange happens to that person.

[ 8 : 27 ] Paul says, by faith, we are joined to Jesus in a supernatural way. It's the kind of language that he starts to use in verses 19 and 20.

He says there, speaking of himself and Christians, he says, we are with Christ. He says that Christ lives in me.

There is a union between the believer and with Christ. And because of that union, when we trust in a crucified saviour, we also experience a kind of death.

Paul says, doesn't he, in verse 20, I have been crucified with Christ. Ever since I was a student, I've had a student loan to pay off.

And it's just there. I don't want to think about it, but it's there. And it's a significant amount of money. I'm talking thousands here. I try not to think about it. And over the years, I've tried to chip away at this debt, paying a little bit each month.

[ 9 : 36 ] But I kind of recently realised that unless I win the lottery or something, the day I pay this debt off is a long, long way into the future. And actually, I've worked out the exact day it's going to be.

It's going to be the day that I die. According to the law on debt in this country, debts are written off when you die.

They're not passed on to anyone else. My wife won't have to pay them. My children won't have to pay them. I'll be debt free when I'm dead. It's a lovely thought, isn't it?

Can you see where I'm going on this? That the only way to lose this debt that we owe God is in his death.

It is in a kind of death. Paul says, when you trust in Jesus, the one who died, it's as if you are walking around in a cemetery, and suddenly you see a grave, and it's really odd, because your name is written there.

[ 10 : 42 ] I am crucified with Christ, he says. In this way, his death gets rid of our debt. People know this, don't they?

People try and fake their own debt to get rid of debt. Do you hear about that guy who disappeared to the Maldives for years? He faked his own debt to get rid of his creditors off his back.

He found out that the problem was that the debt wouldn't go away. His main problem was that he was still alive. The debt lived on. But a person who trusts in Jesus, Paul says, experiences a real kind of death with Jesus.

Sounds morbid, doesn't it? But Paul is saying, as you look at Jesus Christ dying on the cross, by faith you are watching your own death in a mirror.

You are seeing yourself and the debt that you carry with you being killed off once and for all. You are seeing what you deserve, watching as the verdict you deserve is placed on him.

[ 11 : 56 ] And because you have died there with Christ, you've really escaped. You're in the Maldives. You've escaped the debt you owe forever and you'll never be asked to pay.

You can't do enough, but Christ has done enough. How Paul describes it is really black and white, noticed in this section.

There are only two ways that you can approach God. One is through works of the law and one is through faith in Jesus.

One is to try and pay off the debt yourself and the other is to die with Christ. So what does that mean? What does it mean to die with Christ?

It means to stop Project Me. It means not trying to rebuild that building. It means to kill off Project Me and trust Jesus' work instead, totally.

[13:02] And when you do that, Paul says Christ will help you. He will change you. It won't be everything all at once, but he will change you. Paul says, doesn't he, in verse 20, it's now no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

He'll give you his Holy Spirit to change your heart. And actually, the strange thing is, when you stop trying to please God for your justification, and you die with Christ, actually, slowly, you'll get better at pleasing God.

Now, I just want to say, it is really easy to muddy the waters. Because Paul is clear here, it is not some of Jesus' works, with me kind of topping that up myself, with some good works of my own. The Gospel of the Lord Jesus is never a kind of combination of the two. And this is really easy to get wrong. Now, I know I'm going to offend at least one of you here, but my job is to give you the truth.

This is where the Roman Catholic Church, at least constitutionally, has departed from the Apostle Paul. And this comes in the way that we understand words like faith, and grace, and works.

[14:27] Now, don't get me wrong, because I'm not saying that Paul is saying that good works don't matter. I'm not saying that at all. Later in Galatians, we'll see that he really says that good works do matter.

But the Christian reformers taught that good works are a mark of genuine faith in Jesus, which leads to this justification.

Works do matter. But they also taught that justification is not because of those good works. And that's really important. But the difference, it seems to be, in Rome is that faith that justifies includes those works.

It is that when we believe in Jesus, we're joined to him by faith. And Jesus infuses grace into us.

And he kind of gives us a leg up and helps us to justify ourselves by our own good works.

And hence, the kind of end of that is doctrines like penance and purgatory. Now, if you want to talk with me about that afterwards, I'd be really happy to read with you the articles of Trent over a coffee, if that's your thing, or the Vatican articles, to see that.

[15:43] But having said that, as well, I want to say that mixing faith with works can creep up everywhere. Charismatics, Baptists, Methodists, Anglicans, Pentecostals, yes, even Presbyterians, we all can end up doing this.

We just find different ways of doing it. And it's a temptation for all of us. Calvin said that we always want to be somewhat.

We desperately want to feel like we are doing something and Project Me is working. And actually, it is that temptation that remains the only reason why some people don't believe.

And maybe why you don't today. You know, because of Jesus, the only thing that is stopping you from knowing God and avoiding the punishment that you and I deserve, it's not only your sin, but more so, I think Paul is saying here, actually, the one thing that stops you knowing God is actually your good works.

The only way to be right with God is to give up on that. To give up on Project Me and to trust in Jesus alone.

[17:13] And to die with him and be debt free. And to stop trusting in your own good works. Someone has helpfully written, all you need to be right with God is need.

And all you must have is nothing. I pray that you will have that before God, that you will have nothing and that you will trust in Christ alone.

Lest you should say, I don't trust Jesus because I don't need Jesus because I'm good enough. Let's pray. Let's pray.