

## **Justification: We All Need It**

Galatians 2:15-17

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Let's turn to Galatians chapter number 2, and we'll read together from verse number 11 through to verse 21. Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed. Before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles. When they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also were found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Father, we come before You asking for the grace of Your Holy Spirit to be working in our lives at this very hour, that as we look to Your word, our eyes will be opened, our hearts will be touched, and our lives, Lord God, will be changed. Changed into the image of Your Son, changed to reflect more of Your beauty, of Your holiness, of Your glorious praise. Oh Lord, I pray You would help Your church to be all that she's being called to be, and that she might be all that she's being called to be through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ and through the power of the Holy Spirit. We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen.

We come now to verse 15 to 21 of this chapter 2 of Galatians, where we are recounting the words that Paul said to Peter as a rebuke to him at Anti-

och because of his hypocrisy, as he was a Jew living as a Gentile, but then when the Jews came up from Jerusalem, he played the hypocrite, pretending that he was still like those Jews that did not understand what the cross of Jesus Christ had done to bring together in one body both Jew and Gentile. And so, Paul is rebuking Peter. He is not only rebuking Peter, but he's speaking to all those Jews that were caught up in the dissimulation also, and he is continuing this right from verses 15 through to verse number 21, verse 14 included actually, but we looked at verse 14 already.

Now, consider this passage of scripture, verse 15 to 21, is perhaps one of the most important passages in the Bible, and at least the most important passage in the Bible, one of the most important passages of the Bible when it comes to the topic or subject or theme of justification. Apart from the book of Romans, which elaborates this truth more fully in chapters 3 and chapters 4, and even in chapter number 5, here we have another very powerful but short exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ. But this portion of scripture, verses 15 to 22, introduces in the entire epistle a kind of transition, a transition into the doctrinal section of this epistle. We've been looking at Paul's argumentation for why he's a true apostle and why his gospel has been given to him by revelation of Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus and was not given to him by human mediation. But now, Paul goes in through this very interesting recounting of this story. He goes in to introduce the doctrinal section of this epistle, which will span from this very section to the end of chapter 4. And the way that he does this is unusual. He does it through the telling of this story or this recounting of this historical event that happened there at Antioch. But what he does is he weaves through this recounting of this story certain themes that will reappear in the rest of the epistle that have not yet appeared up until this point. So in this very section, verse 15 to 21, we are introduced to new words that haven't yet appeared in the epistle, like "justified," like "the law," "the works of the law," "faith," "faith in Jesus Christ." We are introduced to the concept of union and co-crucifixion with Jesus Christ. We are introduced to the idea of righteousness. And Paul wisely is weaving these themes into this section, and then he will go and develop and elaborate on all those themes throughout the rest of the epistle.

But what we must understand also, as we come to consider this section, is that Paul is not primarily wanting us to think of these doctrines in light of what happened at Antioch. Yes, it is true that he's recounting a story that happened, a true situation that happened between Peter, the Jews, and Paul at Antioch regarding social customs and undermining and not walking according to the truth of the gospel. That is true. But we must never forget that the reason why Paul is telling this story or recounting this account of what happened with Peter is not because he just wants us to know what happened with Peter. He is trying to deal with something particularly

in the lives of the people at Galatia. He's trying to deal with this "another gospel," this other gospel that has infiltrated the church that, yes, is causing the same divisions that happened at Antioch. But what Paul wants the churches of Galatia to understand is that as you get your gospel straight, so you get your implications of that gospel also arranged and organized. So the behavior that was taking place at Antioch was a result of Peter not walking straight according to the truth of the gospel. And what Paul wants the Galatians to understand is that if you go off on your gospel, you will also go off on other areas of how you are to relate to one another in the church of Jesus Christ.

So what Paul does is not elaborate on social customs and how Jews and Gentiles are to relate to one another. He doesn't do that. What he does is that he goes right for the heart of the issue, and he elaborates the very gospel itself, knowing that if I get that straight and they get this straight, everything else should be able to resolve itself. I'm a licensed painter. I've been a painter for several years. I've thrown the brush away a couple of years back, but as a painter, often I would go into people's houses, and they would be looking at the cracks all along the sides of their cornices and all these different things. And one of the things they wanted the painter to do is to get these, get the no more gaps, gap filler, and fill up all the cracks, and the cracks in the wall, they wanted us to patch all the cracks up and then repaint the house so it can look brand new again. Often it wasn't an issue with the painting, but they always kind of wanted those cracks to disappear. But as a painter, I would regularly tell the customer, "Listen, if this crack is coming because of a structural problem, no amount of no more gaps and no amount of gap filler and patchwork will be able to resolve the issue. If there's movement, the cracks will reappear." I remember doing a house like that, and it was just by the time I was done, it looked great. It was a family member's house, and I returned back there a couple of months, and all that crack started coming back again. And what Paul is doing here is very much similar to that. He's saying, "If we just try and address the cracks alone, they're going to reappear. If I just try and, you know, tell you how you should relate to one another as Jews and Gentiles, that is good, that is fine, but they will just reappear. But if we get the structure right, if we get the foundation right, if we get the very cause of the issue right, then it will resolve the other issues that will be fixed."

And so, in the very way Paul then develops this doctrine of justification for the churches of Galatia, yes, in light of what happened at Antioch, but particularly for them. And I want to encourage you, as we go through in the next couple of weeks through the doctrine of justification, that you will not say to yourself, "I know this doctrine already, and I've known it for many years, and I can tell you about it." I want you to understand that if you go off on this doctrine just slightly, or if you don't live in light of its truths day

by day, you will find that you will struggle in your walk with the Lord Jesus Christ and with God. And so, it's important for us to realize that even though these things may be familiar to us, they are nonetheless essential for us to keep us from, as it were, cracks reappearing in different places in our spiritual house.

Now, verse 15 of this passage is where Paul begins, and he says this in verse 15, "We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, we know that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ." Now, if it hasn't struck you yet, that is a very strange statement, isn't it? Verse 15 says, "We who are Jews by nature or by birth and not sinners of the Gentiles." Interesting. How would he understand that? Is Paul saying that the Jews are not sinners but Gentiles are sinners, and therefore, you know, then Jews are safe? Well, that is not what is being said. In fact, he 's saying the very opposite. If you read down to verse number 17, we can understand the sense in which he is saying it. And as we read to verse 17, I want you to follow one little word, the word "we." Right, follow the word "we" as we read through this section. "We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing—we could supply the idea that 'we knowing' or 'we therefore knowing'—that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also have found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin?" And he says, "Certainly not."

Paul's argument here is simply showing quite the opposite, that we who are Jews by birth also need to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ and are also like the Gentiles, found out to be sinners, and therefore need His saving grace. But in what sense does Paul then say and contrast "we who are Jews by birth or by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles"? Well, what Paul is referring to there is what was commonly understood by Jewish people and by even the Gentiles of that day. And Paul elaborates this in other places of scripture, but the Jews had a covenant or covenantal advantage over the Gentiles. They were at an advantage. They were because God had chosen Abraham and his offspring after him. They were the people of God. The children of Israel were those that were God's people, those people that belong to the Mosaic Covenant, those people that were blessed by God as a nation. They were not pagans outside of the grace of God and the manifestation of God's glory and power. God was among them in the tabernacle and in the witness of the word. The word was in them; it was given to them; it was upon their hearts and upon their minds, even as children. And by nature, they were born into and the men were circumcised into this relationship with God in the covenant relationship that existed under the Mosaic Covenant there in Mount Sinai. And as God delivered

His people out of Egypt, and it was physical—a physical lineage, physical circumcision—and the Gentiles did not have those advantages that the Jews had. And therefore, we can see it in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 12, when Paul recounts the Gentiles' conversion and inclusion into the body of Christ, he reminds them that they were aliens from the Commonwealth of Israel, and they were strangers from the covenants of promise, and they were without hope and without God in the world. And Paul elaborates these advantages in the book of Romans so much more, as one of them was read to us this morning. It says, "Then what advantage does the Jew have, or what profit is there in circumcision?" And Paul says, "Much in every way, chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God." He's saying to them were given the Word of God. The prophets spoke to the nation of Israel. They gave them the truth of God, the law of God was given to them. They grew up under its rule, under its authority. They had it in their midst.

And turn with me, if you like, to the book of Romans, and hold your fingers in Galatians, but Romans chapter number nine. And in Romans chapter nine, we see Paul elaborates the covenant privileges of the Jewish people. Look at what it says here in Romans chapter 9, verse number one: "I tell the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my countrymen according to the flesh, who are Israelites, to whom pertain the adoption, the glory, the covenants, the giving of the law, the service of God, and the promises; and of whom are the fathers, from whom, according to the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, the eternally blessed God. Amen." And here, undoubtedly, Paul is not shying away from the reality that the Jews, in covenant relationship with God, were God's people under a blessing that was not the same way yet extended to the Gentiles. These are advantages.

And so, in the Jewish mind, they understood that they were not sinners of the Gentiles. They were God's people. They were not the people of the world, the people of the Gentiles, the people of the nations. They belonged to God. There to them was the adoption, and their whole history was shaped by a knowledge of this God. You've got to think about how amazing this is. The Gentiles didn't grow up with stories about how God rescued their fathers and their fathers' fathers from the hand of their enemies and gave them glory and manifested His power and His glory and His authority. They weren't growing up on that. They had idols, but they didn't have Yahweh. They didn't have the true and living God and the manifestation of His glory and His power through their history and in their genealogy and in their line and lineage. But for the Jews, that was very different.

But this advantage became a unique problem to the children of Israel, a

great problem, in fact, a great stumbling block for spiritual pride. If you remember what the Lord Jesus says to those Jews which believed of Him in John chapter 8, verse 33, He said, "If you continue in My word, then you are My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." And straight away, these Jews responded to Jesus, saying, "Hang on a minute, free? What do you mean we'll be made free? We are Abraham's descendants and have never been enslaved to anyone." And Jesus says, "He that commits sin is a servant of sin, and the servant does not abide in the house, but if the Son shall make you free, you shall be free indeed." And so, they thought that they were under bondage. "Free? We've never been slaves to anyone." And they pointed to who? Abraham's descendants. They pointed to their advantage. They pointed to their privilege and said, "We're safe because we're Abraham's children."

And the same happened when John the Baptist came preaching the Messiah and preaching the baptism of repentance there, and the Pharisees and Sadducees were told to repent, to believe on Him, and to show forth fruits worthy of repentance. You know what John says to them? "Say not to yourselves"—he knew exactly what they're going to say—"We are Abraham's descendants, for God is able from these stones to raise up children unto Abraham." And what is John saying? "Do not rest on your privilege. Do not rest on your advantage to think that you are safe because you had a lineage and descended from a certain line."

Oh yes, you may not be sinners as the Gentiles, in that you were under covenant advantage and privilege, but that does not mean you are safe. And this is Paul's answer that comes through in that very scenario. In the very same way, the Jews at Antioch were behaving in a way that would segregate the body of Christ and to put difference between Jew and Gentile. And what Paul says to them, "You remember this. Even though we are not sinners as the Gentiles, you know just as well as I do that a man is not justified by the works of the law. Even though the oracles of God were committed to you, and even though you know the law, and even though you say that you keep the law, and that you can recite the law," he says, "a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. Even we—yes, me too, Paul; yes, you too, Peter; yes, you too, Jews at Antioch—even we, just like the Gentiles, have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight." And then he goes on to say, "And if we seek to be justified by Christ and we also have found sinners, is Christ therefore the minister of sin?" No way. Christ is not the minister of sin. Christ doesn't serve people a sin and cause them to sin. No, not at all. In fact, we are found sinners, both Jew and Gentile, are found out as sinners when they seek to be justified by Christ. Why? Because they realize that the law is not a sufficient righteousness to save,

and they realize that your lineage and your heritage and the works of the law cannot make you right in the sight of God. You need to be justified by Christ, and the way to be justified by Christ is to be found out as sinners. Yes, both Jew and Gentiles. And so, Paul's whole argument here is simply this: "We also are justified sinners too."

And what he does is he levels the playing field. He levels the playing field between Jew and Gentiles, and he says, "Oh sure, you have advantage, but advantage doesn't save." It says in Romans chapter nine also, verse six to eight, "For they are not all Israel which are of Israel, nor are they all children because they are the seed of Abraham. Those who are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as the seed." Yes, you may point to your physical lineage that spans back and shows a connection to Abraham, but unless you want to be true children of God, you must have faith in Jesus Christ. Those are the ones that are the children of the promise. Your advantage doesn't equal salvation. Your advantage doesn't even equal righteousness.

In Romans chapter three, verse nine, he says, "What then? Are we better than they? No, in no wise. For we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin." What is Paul saying here? Everyone who is under Christ must first realize that they are under sin, no matter what advantage they may have had in their lives. And what Paul is teaching here, and what he is leading into, is showing that this is the very foundation upon which we are to understand the doctrine of justification. Without being found a sinner, there is no need for righteousness. And what Paul is saying is, without sin, there is no need for justification. But if you confess to be justified by faith in Jesus Christ, you have confessed yourself to be sinners, you see, because justification deals with our legal standing and the righteousness that we have or don't have before God. It's legal; it's forensic; it's showing whether or not a person is accepted in the sight of God or rejected in the sight of God. Am I just before God and are considered unjust, unrighteous, and guilty? Justification, therefore, presupposes that men and women, and all of us, children included, are guilty before God. And justification deals with the very guilt of sin, and that actual guilt of sin, the fact that our sin debt and record stands before God, and He looks upon man and sees their sinfulness, their utter unworthiness, and their depravity, and their total violation of the truth and law of God, and every one of those sins is imputed unto us, all the sin, Jew and Gentile, all the violation of the law, all the times God has said something, and we've broken it. And Paul's saying this is true of everyone.

Justification, the need for righteousness, the impartation or the imputation of God's righteousness to the sinner, presupposes that we are all guilty. And I believe if anyone has an honest look within themselves, it would not

only be that they would understand their actual guilt before God, but they would understand their felt guilt before God. The whole world, the Bible teaches us, lies under the sway of the wicked one. And the Bible also teaches us that there is none righteous, no, not one. And that is demonstrated in the unrighteous deeds that proceed from the hearts of corrupted men and women. And man seeks to quench that conscience that burns within him. He sears it; he denies it; he rejects that voice of conscience; he rejects the voice even of the Holy Spirit that convinces the world of sin, righteousness, and of judgment, and covers that—that guilt of sin—or seeks to suppress it by self-deception.

And how may they deceive themselves? They reduce the holiness of God. "If God is not this holy, then I don't feel that sinful." Or they might seek to compare themselves to others and not actually to true righteousness before God. Or they might simply, uh, try to trust in law works, and they will not focus on the things that they have done wrong, but they will just keep looking to the things that they have done right. And they say, "Look, I've done this, and I've done this, and I've done that, and I've done that," and they minimize those sins that they've committed against God. Or they might look at their lineage or their tradition or their history or even trust in the fact that they know certain things, and they feel safe, and they feel comfortable. Their pedigree, what they know, their relationship to other people, and they suppress the sinfulness of sin in order that they might feel right before God.

But the Bible teaches us the whole world lies guilty before God. There is not a soul that is alive today that, standing alone outside of the righteousness of Christ, is accepted by God. They are all under sin. And the need to be justified is a need, therefore, for every person, no matter whether they are Jew or Gentile, no matter what they know or don't know. Justification is needful for every soul that has sinned. How can a man be righteous before God? This is the ultimate question, which we'll get to in the next couple of weeks, but this is the question that is at the very heart of why people feel their consciences weighed down and sin pressing heavy on their minds.

If you have ever read "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," or "Grace Abounding" by John Bunyan, you would peer into the life of a man that struggled with his conscience. Not only did he understand that he was actually guilty before God, but the felt guilt of sin weighed heavy on his mind. And it was John Bunyan that said regarding Luther, Luther's commentary on Galatians, this is what he said: "I prefer this book of Martin Luther upon the Galatians, accepting the Holy Bible, before all books that I've ever seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience." Most fit for a wounded conscience. What he's saying is the doctrine of justification explained is the most fit doctrine for a wounded conscience that has been wounded by the sharp arrows



of sin. He goes on to say, "If I was lost"—so he says, "I was lost. If I had not Christ, because I had been a sinner, I saw that I wanted a perfect righteousness to present me without fault before God, and this righteousness was nowhere to be found but in the person of Jesus Christ." What John Bunyan understood is what every true sinner understands that comes to the realization of their sin and comes to the understanding of what they need to do to be saved. They understand that the righteousness of Christ is my only hope to be accepted before God.

What Paul is saying in this passage of scripture, as one of the implications of this doctrine, is that there is no hope for Christian unity in the church without a proper understanding of our sin and of righteousness. If we don't understand from whence we came, we don't understand the God that we have offended. When man thinks of themselves as less guilty than what they truly are before God, their hearts are lifted up in pride. When man seeks a righteousness outside of Christ, they are seeking a righteousness that maybe not everyone can have. How can the Gentile have a righteousness that comes from advantage, which only the Jew has? They were born in a pagan family, and therefore, righteousness is not available to them. They don't even know the law. Must they also be circumcised? Must they also keep the traditions to be considered righteous before God? And you can imagine how wrong views of sin and wrong views of righteousness can lead to division in the church. It was happening at Antioch. All of a sudden, these Jewish Christians felt like they had an edge on the Gentile Christians. And what Paul is saying here, "No, no, no, we are justified sinners too, Peter. We are justified sinners too, oh Jews there at Antioch that have been carried away."

You see, it is self-righteousness that was the very sin of the Pharisees. And I say of the Pharisees and more people than the Pharisees, but I use the Pharisees because their name actually means that they were separatists. It was because they themselves thought themselves to be better than others that they themselves separated themselves from others. Do you understand that? So two men go into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee, one a publican. The Pharisee goes in and says, "I thank God that I'm not like this man. I fast twice in a week; I give tithes at all that I possess. And, you know, I'm—man, look at me." The publican goes in; he can't even lift up his eyes toward heaven, but he beats upon his breast, saying, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner." And God—Jesus says, "That man, that confessed his sin, goes home to his house justified because he humbled himself and was broken and saw himself as sinful." But this other man, the one who trusted in his self-righteousness, he was not justified before God.

You can see the separation that existed because of self-righteousness and pride. And Paul is saying, "You remember where you came from, Jews. You

came from the self-righteousness of sin also. Yes, you had advantage, but your advantage doesn't mean that you are without sin. Your advantage doesn't mean that you are not in need of the righteousness of Christ. Your advantage doesn't mean that you are safe without a Savior, without the Lord Jesus, without His righteousness." And he's basically saying, "Enough with the division. See to it that you understand also that you are sinners indeed."

And the remedy for disunity in the church is very much the same as we all come to remember the life from which we were delivered, whether it was the slavery of sin and the deepest, darkest lust and the deepest, darkest sinfulness, or whether or not it was just as equally bad in your self-righteousness. We are justified sinners too. You see, some people say, "Oh, I was a sinner like this and like this and like that," and others say, "Well, I wasn't so bad in my past." And therefore, they—they can say, "Well, we have the church of the good, holy ones that had good advantage growing up, and then we have the church of those that have been, you know, stuffed around and messed up in their lives." Well, although those things may be true, what makes you think that the filth of self-righteousness is not more offensive than the filth of your lust and drug abuse?

You see, Paul even goes on to say, "If my righteousness comes by the law, then Christ died for nothing." Could there be a more offensive statement to make in the sight of God than to say that your Son, which died, died for nothing because I can achieve a righteousness for myself? What greater offense that there could be than to tread upon the Son of God and His blood like that, to do despite to the Spirit of grace because we think that we are made righteous by our own keeping of the law? It's amazing how we categorize sins in terms of offenses before God, and we end up having a guilt and condemnation upon our lives as we compare ourselves to one another. But you know what Paul says? "We are all justified sinners too, no matter of your advantage or your disadvantage. The reality is we are all guilty before God and need Christ as our righteousness."

And we need to be careful of the same problem that was for the Jews regarding their advantage. We need to be careful that we don't rest on the same. How many of us have been brought up in a religious upbringing today? You may be part of a Christian home and a Christian family, and you feel safe because you were taught the Word of God from a young age. How many of us think about ourselves as, "Oh, are you a Christian? Are you God's child?" And many people in evangelical churches will say, "Oh yes, I was baptized. My parents baptized me when I was a child, and therefore I'm safe." Others will point to the fact of their Christian parents, or that their uncle was a preacher, and their grandfather was a preacher, and they grew up in a line of preachers. Others might think that, "Oh, I'm safe because

I belong to a Christian country, and I had Christian political views, and therefore I'm on the side of the right, and therefore God is happy with me." Others think that they are safe because they say that they are Christians and they're not Muslims, and they're not Buddhists, and they're not Hindus, and they know about Jesus Christ. All these may be advantages, but they are not sufficient to save or to declare one as righteous in the sight of God.

We are born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the Word of God which lives and abides forever. And John goes on to say about that very same truth, that those that received Him, to them gave He power to become the children of God, even to those who believe on His name, both Jew and Gentile. But who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. Born of God. God intervening. God saving. God giving life to the dead. God declaring the sinner as righteous. Not born of the will of flesh, nor of lineage, nor of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.

What is he saying here? That those that are truly born of God, they also had the grace of God come to them in their sin. There are countless people right now that are perishing in hell because they have trusted in their advantage, and their advantage had led to their stumbling block, which has led to their condemnation. This was common right throughout the history of the church. In the 1700s, we had a time of, in England, where there was, as it were, we would say, a great religious acceptance in many ways. Churches were filled every Lord's day. There were people packing the churches, confessing Christ, and there were people that were—were not like it was today. They were a Christian nation. They were people that, you know, were under great advantage. They came from the Puritan era and history. Our fathers were the great Puritans that brought in the truth and good doctrine and great teaching. They had great religious education in their schools, in their universities. The—the nation of England, great missionary endeavors. We've sent out great missionaries to advance many in the cause of the gospel.

But that very same nation, with that very same advantage, with that very same glorious history, when Whitfield and Wesley came to preach in those pulpits, they were banned from preaching in many of those pulpits. Why? Because they preached the new birth. Because they preached regeneration. And they stood there amongst a people that have been in church for years and years and years and years. They had generations of preachers, and uncles, and all these people, and they had a great history and tradition, and Whitfield and Wesley preached repentance, preached turning to Christ, taught the new birth, and many people kicked them out of their parishes and said, "We don't want this preaching anymore. Take it to the

streets. These guys are too intense." They couldn't stand an evangelical gospel. They didn't want to be found out as sinners.

And we must be careful that that same thing that happened to them can happen to us and to our children and to this church. Be wary. Be careful, dear people of God, that we do not come to the place where we feel like we understand the doctrines of justification by faith, that they no longer need to be proclaimed in the pulpit. Do not take for granted that your children understand the doctrines of salvation and how to have the truth of Jesus Christ because they are among God's people. Do not rest in the safety and comfort of your church attendance. Do not rest in the safety and comfort of your parents, or of your family, of your grandparents, or of your knowledge. You must rest alone in the blood of Jesus Christ and His righteousness for your salvation. For we are all just one generation away from turning to the works of the law and no longer trusting and believing in justification by faith in Jesus Christ.

And Martin Luther said it. He goes, "This doctrine must be hammered time and time again into the heads of the people of God." It was soon, even after the Reformation, that people turned back to Rome and denied those very things that were only freshly taught to them by Luther and the reformers. Being surrounded by truth is not enough. Subscribing to the truth is not enough. Let me ask you this question in closing: What is your life—should I say, what is your hope in life and in death? Do you belong to Jesus Christ? Do you have a living, vibrant, true relationship with Him? Are you trusting in what you are doing or not doing in order for you to find acceptance in the sight of God? Or do you bank your hope alone in Jesus's righteousness? Have you been found out to be a sinner, or do you not see yourself in terms of sinfulness? Do you think that your goodness or even your sanctification recommends you to God, or do you understand the depths of your own sinful depravity and see that your only hope in life and death is Jesus's blood and righteousness?

Can you say with the hymn writer, "My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name"? Can you say, as we sang before, "Guilty, vile, and helpless we; spotless Lamb of God was He. Full atonement, can it be? Hallelujah, what a Savior"? As soon as you lose sight of that, be very careful of the direction of your life. Let us pray.