

Theology on the Web.org.uk

Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

A table of contents for *The Churchman* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_churchman_os.php

Justification Applied

Guy Prentiss Waters

Introduction

In the Epistle to the Galatians, Paul uses a fascinating word to describe the state of the justified believer—‘freedom’.

For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of slavery. Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. (Gal. 5:1-3).

To many in the West, the word ‘freedom’ evokes precious political liberties. We think of *Magna Carta* or the Declaration of Independence. Those of us who enjoy this kind of freedom should be grateful for it. But when the Scripture speaks of the liberty or freedom of the Christian, it is not speaking of political freedom. Christian freedom belongs to each and every Christian. It is a freedom that Christ has secured and granted uniquely to believers. This is the highest form of liberty that any human being can possibly receive.

Biblical liberty is a two-sided coin. The justified believer has both freedom *from* certain things and freedom *for* certain things. In this article, we will reflect on both aspects of our freedom in Christ. We must issue a caution before we proceed. It is easy to confuse biblical freedom with sinful license. Many believe that biblical freedom means that we are free to live any way that we please. License is, of course, no freedom at all. License is what the Bible calls bondage to sin (Rom. 6:16-17, 19; see also 2 Peter 2:19). The Scripture says that we are most free when we are in glad subjection to the one, true, living God. Let us now explore what it is *from* which we are free as justified persons, and what it is *for* which we are free as justified persons. We will then consider some of the tremendous comfort that justification has for the believer in times of distress and disappointment.

Freedom from...

In the previous article, we saw that the Bible teaches that God does not look at our performance when he justifies us. He only looks at Christ’s work when he justifies us. The Bible does more than assert these things. It reasons with us and tries to dissuade us from trusting in our own works for justification. Two

such dissuasive passages are found in the Epistle of Paul to the Galatians. False teachers (the ‘Judaizers’) had infiltrated the church at Galatia. Their error was subtle. They were not telling the Galatians to replace Christ’s work for justification with their own observance of the law. They were teaching the Galatians to add their own work to Christ’s work for justification.

Paul can hardly believe that the Galatians would even entertain such a proposal (Gal. 3:1-5). But he is confident that in the clear light of day they will not turn their backs on the biblical doctrine of justification by faith alone (Gal. 5:10). This is why he writes this letter to them. He wants them to see two things. First, the justified believer is free from the curse and condemnation of the law (Gal. 3:10-14). Second, he is freed from any burden of entering into the favour of God on the basis of his own record (Gal. 5:1-3).

Galatians 3:10-14

In Galatians 3:10-14, the apostle Paul says that ‘all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse’. He is not simply saying that those who look to the law to bring them into God’s favour will fail this quest. He is saying that those who look to the law to bring them into God’s favour will find themselves under the curse of God. They will be under God’s curse because they are sinners. The only thing that the law is in a position to do to a sinner is to ‘curse’ him.

Paul is saying to the Galatians and to us that to look to one’s performance to secure life is foolish. We will never achieve life by keeping the law. Because of sin, the law speaks only the curse of God to us. The apostle does not leave believers to despair this pitiable condition. He does not leave us without hope. But our hope does not lie in ourselves. It lies only in Christ. Paul tells believers that Christ has ‘redeemed us from the curse of the law’. How? By helping us to keep the law perfectly so that we can finally enter into God’s favour? No, Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law by taking the curse due to his people for sin at the cross (Gal. 3:13). We can be free from that curse because Christ bore it for sinners. It is only Christ and his work for sinners that can bring a person out of ‘curse’ and into ‘blessing’ (Gal. 3:14).

Galatians 5:1-3

Paul tells believers that they have been ‘set free’ by Christ (Gal. 5:1). Their freedom means that they are no longer subject to a ‘yoke of slavery’. What does

Paul have in mind by this ‘freedom’ and ‘yoke of slavery’? He is certainly not saying that the Christian is freed from the obligation to keep God’s standards for living as they are found in the Ten Commandments (Gal. 5:13-14).

Paul’s concern, rather, is with a person who is trying to keep the commandments of the law for his justification. When Paul speaks of a ‘yoke of slavery’, he primarily has in mind the incredible burden resting upon every sinner who has not trusted in Christ for salvation.¹ He is thinking of the impossible task of keeping the law perfectly for justification. Paul calls this a ‘burden’. When Christ sets a man free, he relieves him of the burden of keeping the commandments of God to enter into God’s favour.

This is why Paul objects so strongly to the Galatians receiving circumcision. In the church at Galatia, if one agreed to be circumcised, circumcision suggested that he was in agreement with the false teachers. The false teachers were saying that a person must be circumcised in order to be a true Christian. They were saying that Christ’s work was not enough to justify a person. They had to add their own obedience to Christ’s work.

Paul follows this doctrine to its logical conclusions. He tells the Galatians that to receive circumcision on these terms commits them to keep the entirety of the Mosaic law for their justification (Gal. 5:3). He tells them that if they choose to go this route, then they are entirely on their own. ‘If you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you’ (Gal. 5:2). You cannot have it both ways, the apostle is saying. You may try to have either Christ or your own works as the basis of your justification. What you may not have is ‘Christ plus your works’ as the basis of your justification. ‘Choose,’ Paul says, ‘either Jesus Christ or your own performance as the route to your justification.’

This is why Paul goes on to say ‘you are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace’ (v. 4). We need to be careful when we read this warning. Paul is not saying that truly justified believers have now lost the grace of justification. A truly justified person can never again fall under divine condemnation (Rom. 8:1).

What, then, is Paul saying at verse four? He is saying that any professing Christian who seeks to enter into the favour of God on the basis of his own

record has effectively renounced what he once publicly professed himself to be—a sinner justified because of the merits of Christ alone. Paul gives a stern warning to the Galatians: if you sincerely continue to follow the Judaizers (and I hope that you will not), then you will show to yourselves and to the world that you never were justified persons.

Paul is reminding you and me how important the doctrine of justification is to the Christian life. Justification by faith alone sits at the very heart of the gospel. To depart knowingly and willfully from this doctrine is to put one's soul in danger of perishing. This is why Paul opens the body of these letters with these powerful words:

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed (Gal. 1:6-9).

The Reformer Martin Luther once rightly said of justification by faith alone that it is 'the article by which the church stands or falls'. The late Dr. John H. Gerstner adapted Luther's statement when he said that justification by faith alone is the article by which you the Christian stand or fall. If we genuinely choose the 'yoke of slavery' then we will show ourselves never to have known Christian freedom in the first place.

Freedom To...

We have seen that part of the Christian's freedom consists in a freedom from the curse of the law, and from any burden to keep the law's demands to enter into God's favour. We have also seen Paul stress that Christian freedom is not free. In fact it comes at a tremendous cost. At the cross, the Son of God endured the curse and condemnation that was due to his people. That Jesus Christ willingly bore the curse of the law for sinners renders his sacrifice all the more remarkable. He did not go to the cross against his will. His love for his people drove him to the cross. This is why Paul can speak of Christ as him 'who loved me and gave himself for me' (Gal. 2:20).

No Christian can be indifferent or unmoved in the face of the precious truth of the love of Christ for sinners at the cross. This kind of love, the Scripture teaches, demands a response. This is why the Scripture describes the Christian's freedom in terms of his keeping the law of God. Keeping the law of God is the way that God has appointed for the believer to show his thankfulness to Christ.² Let us turn to two passages to help us understand this aspect of Christian freedom.

Galatians 5:13

In Galatians 5:13, Paul speaks of freedom as something to which believers have been 'called'. He uses the word 'call' to say that Christian freedom carries with it certain responsibilities and obligations.

One responsibility is that we not abuse our Christian freedom 'as an opportunity for the flesh'. What does Paul mean by 'flesh'? He explains what he means by this word in Galatians 5:16-21. By 'flesh', Paul has in mind the sin that remains in every Christian. When Paul tells us that we 'not use [our] freedom as an opportunity for the flesh', he is making an important point. In our ongoing battle against sin, we must never look to the doctrine of justification by faith alone as an excuse or pretext to commit sin. We must never think that our freedom from the curse and the condemnation of the law means that we are free from our obligation to keep the law in its entirety. When we see sin, we must flee from it without delay.

Another responsibility of Christian freedom is that we 'through love serve one another'. Notice how Paul defines who the 'one another' are. We are 'brothers' (5:13). We are a family. The Christian family, like my family and your family, has a set of house rules. One key word to our house rules as the family of God is 'love'. Love is a misunderstood word in our modern world. Many people equate love with permissiveness—allowing people to do whatever they please. This is not how the Scripture defines love. The Scripture defines love in terms of keeping God's law. In the next verse (5:14), Paul says, 'for the whole law is fulfilled in one word: "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."' Paul quotes Leviticus 19:18, a passage that Jesus also cites to summarise the second part of the Ten Commandments (see Matt. 22:39). These commandments show us how God calls us to relate to one another (see Matt. 19:18-19). If we wish to 'love' and 'serve one another' as 'free' Christians, the apostle Paul says, then we must do so by obeying God's law.³

When Paul says a few verses later that believers are not ‘under the law’ (5:18), he does not mean that they are free to live as they please. On the contrary, knowing what Christ has done for believers in their justification should prompt them to delight in the moral law and walk by its precepts. We keep the law in the power of the Spirit, by whom we ‘live’ and ‘walk’ (5:25). This kind of life, Paul says, is freedom. He is stating what the psalmist had said centuries earlier, ‘I will walk at liberty, for I seek your precepts’ (Ps. 119:45, NASB).

So why does Paul say that believers are not ‘under the law’? He is saying that the work of our Saviour means that believers have a whole new relationship to the law. Freed from its curse, we may now delight in and obey the law that we once hated and rejected (Rom. 8:7-8). This, Paul says to the Galatians and to us, is true freedom. Do not accept the counterfeits that the world offers us. Accept the genuine freedom found only in Christ.

James 2:14-26

Another passage that shows us that Christian freedom means keeping the law of God comes from the Epistle of James. As we study this passage, we meet a difficulty. James says, ‘You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone’ (James 2:24). This passage seems to pose a problem for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. This passage appears flatly to contradict the doctrine. Critics sometimes draw one of two conclusions from this apparent contradiction. On the one hand, the Protestant doctrine of justification by faith alone is said to contradict the plain teaching of Scripture. James says that the Christian is ‘justified by works’. Therefore justification must not be by faith alone, as Protestants have maintained.

On the other hand, others allege that Paul and James are in irreconcilable contradiction. Paul teaches that we are justified by faith alone (Rom. 3:28). James teaches that we are not justified by faith but by works. How can Paul and James both be right? One does not have to reflect long before he realises how unsettling this difficulty can be. We seem to be caught between the Scylla of justification by our own performance and the Charybdis of biblical errancy.

In our discussion of this passage, we have two objectives. First, we will show that Paul and James are in full harmony. There is no real contradiction between them. Second, we will see James echoing Paul’s teaching that the Christian has been set free in order to keep the commandments of God.

Who is (not) justified?

In this passage, James helps us to understand how a professing Christian can know whether he is a justified person. He tells us that there are certain matters that are no evidence that a person is justified. James is warning us. It is good and desirable that we be assured of our justification. We must not, however, be falsely assured. James addresses one scenario of false assurance in verse 14, ‘What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him?’ James has in mind someone who has professed to be a Christian. He claims to have faith, but he lacks good works (James 2:15-16). James’s phrase ‘that faith’ means ‘a claim to faith that is unaccompanied by good works’. By calling it ‘that faith’, he means to separate it from what theologians have called ‘saving faith’—genuine faith in Christ that is accompanied by good works.

Is there any value, spiritually speaking, to a claim to faith that is not backed by good works? No. James tells us that this faith is ‘dead’ (2:17). It is ‘useless’ (2:20). The apostle uses a graphic image to describe what this faith is like. He tells us that it is like a corpse (2:17, 26). A corpse resembles a living human being, but lacks a principle of vitality. Faith without works is no closer to saving faith than a corpse is to a living, human being.

James offers another reason why this faith is of no spiritual profit in verse 19, ‘You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!’ This faith professes to accept certain propositions. These propositions are not heretical or false. They are orthodox. They are true to biblical teaching. This type of faith may even be accompanied by a strong emotional response to the truth (‘and shudder’).

Even so, assent to biblical teaching and an emotional response to that teaching do not show oneself to be a justified person. After all, the devils are capable of the same assent and of the same emotional response. James’s assumption is that anything that can be true of a devil is no distinguishing mark or trait of a justified child of God.⁴

Let us summarise what James is saying. James tells us that there are three matters that do not prove a person to be justified. They are his profession of Christianity and membership in the visible church; his assent to biblical

teaching; and his emotional response to that teaching. James is not saying that each of these things is undesirable or bad in itself. He is saying that by themselves they do not show that a person is justified.

What shows a person to be justified? James answers this question in verse eighteen, ‘But someone will say, “You have faith and I have works.” Show me your faith apart from the works, and I will show you my faith by my works.’ James tells us that good works show the truth of our faith. They show that our faith is no ‘dead faith’ but ‘saving faith’. James does not say that our good works justify us. They are not the reason why we enter into the favour of God. James says that our good works show the truth and reality of saving faith. The presence of good works identifies true faith and sets it apart from its counterfeits.

James simply claims what other biblical writings affirm. We have seen Paul state the same point in Galatians 5:13-14. The apostle John tells us ‘We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brothers’ (1 John 3:14). Our Lord Jesus taught ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven’ (Matt. 7:21). The Scripture speaks with one voice. Our good works do not bring us into the favour of God. But our good works as Christians do identify us as justified persons.

Exhibit A: Abraham

James takes us to the Old Testament to illustrate his point. What is striking about James’s illustration is his repeated use of the phrase ‘justify by works’. In verse 21, he introduces his example from Abraham’s life by saying, ‘Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?’ In verse twenty-four, he concludes his example by saying ‘You see that a person is justified by works and not by faith alone.’ In verse 25, he offers a corroborating example from the Old Testament book of Joshua, ‘And in the same way was not also Rahab the prostitute justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out by another way?’

What is James saying? Let us draw four observations. First, James calls our attention to Abraham’s binding of his son Isaac for sacrifice. We find this event recorded in Genesis 22. Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac is the paramount example

of the patriarch's obedience to God. The only reason that Abraham attempted to sacrifice his son was because God told him to do so.

Second, James helps us to understand the importance of Abraham's act. In verse 22, James tells us 'You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works'. Abraham's obedience showed his faith to be the genuine article. That is what James means when he says that Abraham's 'faith was completed by his works'. His faith was no mere claim to faith. Neither was it a simple assent to the truth. His faith was true, saving faith. It produced good works.

Third, James tells us that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac fulfilled what the Scripture says earlier in Genesis 15:6, 'Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness' (quoted at James 2:23). Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 in order to show that Abraham was justified by faith alone (Gal. 3:6; Rom. 4:3, 22). God imputed to Abraham the righteousness of Christ. Abraham received that righteousness by faith alone.

James is in full agreement with Paul. James does not say that Abraham's sins were pardoned and that Abraham was declared righteous because of his obedience. He says that the Scripture which spoke of Abraham's justification by faith alone (Gen. 15:6) was 'fulfilled' when Abraham later offered Isaac (Gen. 22). When Abraham agreed to sacrifice Isaac, he showed who he already was—a justified person. This is why James says that Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac 'fulfilled' the promise of Genesis 15:6. Obedience to God's commandments, the Scripture says, is the way to know that we are justified persons.

James is simply highlighting a point already evident in the narrative of Genesis. After God prevents Abraham from sacrificing Isaac, he tells Abraham, 'Now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me' (Gen. 22:12). The sacrifice of Isaac was a way for Abraham to show publicly who he already was. It was a way for Abraham to demonstrate that he was a justified person. The good works of the Christian, the apostle James teaches, continue to do precisely the same thing today.

Fourth, this same principle surfaces in a second example that James gives, the example of Rahab (2:25). Rahab was a woman who, like Abraham, had faith

in God. We see her faith when she tells the spies ‘the LORD your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath’ (Josh. 2:11). This is no empty confession, James reminds us. She showed the truth of her faith when she risked her own life and the life of her family by giving shelter to the spies of Israel. Her obedience demonstrated the truth of her faith in the God of heaven and earth.

What does James mean when he says that Abraham and Rahab were ‘justified by works?’ Is James contradicting Paul’s statement in Romans, ‘For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law’ (Rom. 3:28)? No. Paul and James are writing in perfect harmony with one another. This is evident when we look at how Paul and James define three words: ‘works’, ‘faith’, and ‘justify’.

First, James and Paul define ‘works’ differently. For James, the ‘works’ in view are the works of the Christian. These works show the truth of the Christian’s faith in Jesus Christ. We might call these works the ‘works of sanctification’, or the ‘works of the Christian life’. These are works in which every Christian must abound. With this teaching the apostle Paul is in entire agreement. The ‘works’ that Paul has in mind (Gal. 2:16, Rom. 3:28) are altogether different. These works rival or supplement the finished work of Christ as the basis of the sinner’s justification. As such, they are categorically forbidden. No sinner ought to look to his own works in order to enter into God’s favour. James expresses no disagreement with what Paul says on the place of our works in justification.

Second, James and Paul define ‘faith’ differently. For James, the ‘faith’ in view is a claim to faith. A person professes to be a Christian, has membership in the visible church, assents to biblical teaching, and may even have some emotional response to that teaching. ‘Not enough!’ says the apostle. True, saving faith must yield good works. For Paul, the ‘faith’ by which a sinner is justified is a faith that necessarily produces good works (Gal. 5:6, Rom. 8:1-4). Those good works do not secure God’s favour, but those works necessarily accompany saving faith. Paul no less than James rejects any claim to believe in Christ that is unaccompanied by obedience to the commandments of God (Rom. 6:15).

Third, James and Paul define ‘justification’ differently. Paul by ‘justification’ has

in mind the full pardon of a person's sins, and his being accounted righteous in God's sight. This verdict is based solely upon Christ's righteousness, imputed to the believer and received by faith alone. By 'justification' James means 'showing that we are in a justified state'. When James says that we are 'justified by works' he means that our good works show us to be justified persons. James is not concerned in this section of his letter with how a person is justified. He is concerned with how a person knows that he is a justified person (James 2:18). The way that a person knows that he is a justified person is by a life of obedience to God, an obedience that flows from true faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul and James are not in contradiction. Paul and James are in full agreement. If we understand this point, then we are better able to appreciate the importance of James's teaching. A claim to faith, membership in the local church, orthodoxy, and emotional responses to biblical teaching are no evidence that a person is justified. The way that a person knows himself to be justified is by a life of obedience to the commandments of God. James echoes Paul in saying that, while works do not justify us, they are by no means an 'extra' or an optional feature to the Christian life. They are indispensable to the Christian life. The one who has them and knows that he has them may enjoy the comforts of being in a justified state. Let us conclude this article by considering what some of those comforts are.

The Comfort of Justification

In the opening verses of Romans 5, Paul reflects on what justification means to the Christian life. He is especially concerned to apply the doctrine of justification to the suffering Christian. Suffering is something that every Christian must expect to experience (Phil. 1:29, 2 Tim. 3:12). The good news is that the suffering believer's justification means that he has an assurance of peace with God; an enduring joy in the midst of suffering; and an abiding sense of the love of God in Christ. Let us consider each of these precious benefits.

First, Paul tells us that the justified believer has 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ'. To whom does this peace belong? This peace is something that belongs only to the believer since it is a consequence or implication of our justification (5:1). What kind of peace is this? Since God speaks this peace to those who can expect to suffer, we should not think of this peace in terms of the absence of trial, persecution, disappointment, or loss. For the same reason

we should not equate this peace with inner feelings of serenity and calm. It is a peace that is ours even when we grieve and sorrow in the midst of suffering. Paul helps us understand this peace when he says it is ‘through our Lord Jesus Christ’ (Rom. 5:1). This peace is what we might call an objective peace. Once we were under the wrath of God. In Paul’s words, we were ‘by nature children of wrath’ (Eph. 2:3). This is why God says through the prophet, ‘There is no peace for the wicked’ (Isa. 48:22).

But now, Paul says of believers, ‘in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace ...’ (Eph. 2:13-14). God has reconciled us to himself by his Son. If we are resting in the finished work of Christ for our justification, we have the comfort of knowing that we are at peace with God. Because Christ’s work is perfect, complete, and accepted by the Father, and because our peace rests on that work, we will never lose our peace. Our sense of that peace may waver, but our peace itself stands immovable. In verse two, Paul tells believers that God has caused them to ‘stand’ in ‘this grace’, that is, our justification. God will never let us fall under divine condemnation. The reason we will never lose our peace is not our firm grip on God. Our peace in Christ stands firm because of God’s grip on us.

Second, justified persons ‘rejoice in hope of the glory of God’ (Rom. 5:2). Even though we do not presently experience the glory of God as we one day will, we are assured that it is ours in Christ. God has forged an inseparable link between our justification and our glorification (Rom. 8:30), and what God has put together no creature may put asunder. We should rejoice in that glory here and now because our justification is a title to eternal fellowship and communion with the triune God. What does it mean to ‘rejoice in hope of the glory of God’? It means that our joy is not limited or diminished by our circumstances. Think of the apostle Paul. Paul was in prison when he rejoiced (see Phil. 1:3-4, 18), and when he commanded believers to rejoice (3:1, 4:5). Paul is telling us that our hope puts our trials in perspective. He summarises the believer’s earthly suffering as ‘slight momentary affliction’ (2 Cor. 4:17).

Paul is not trivializing or demeaning the very serious things we experience in our lives—illness, death, financial loss, problems in our families, to take but a few examples. Paul was a man deeply acquainted with suffering (see 2 Cor. 11:23-29). His own experiences with suffering had not left him callous to his

fellow believers' trials. In fact, his experiences prompted him to apply Christian comfort to his brothers and sisters in distress (see 2 Cor. 1:3-11).

Why does Paul speak of suffering as slight and momentary? It is because for the believer the worst of earthly suffering pales in comparison with the glory that is his in Christ (Rom. 8:18). It is because God is 'preparing for us an eternal weight of glory' precisely through this 'slight momentary affliction' (2 Cor. 4:17). The world looks at suffering and says: 'Grin and bear it' or 'Whatever does not kill you makes you stronger'. The Scripture calls the believer to look at his justification and then to look at his suffering, and to respond in the only way that he can: to rejoice in the glory that is certainly his in Christ.

Third, the justified believer should be assured that he will never faint under the weight of trial or suffering. 'Hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us' (Rom. 5:5). The Holy Spirit has united us to Jesus Christ. He impresses on us an abiding sense of God's love for us in Jesus Christ. Because it is the Holy Spirit who freshly supplies us with these streams of God's love for us, we have further assurance that we will not perish spiritually when we suffer.

In Romans 5, Paul has pointed us to three crucial truths about justification that we need to understand on our Christian pilgrimage to glory. Justification concerns what happened to us when we became Christians, when we passed from condemnation into the favour of God. Justification is not something that the people of God ever outgrow. It never becomes something we can shelve or file away. It is a definitive act based upon the finished work of Christ, but it never ceases to speak to our Christian living in the here and now.

Because the doctrine of justification by faith alone is far-reaching, errors concerning the doctrine are equally far-reaching. Few aspects of the Christian life are unaffected when one departs from the biblical testimony concerning justification. The next article will consider one important error concerning justification that is facing the church today.

GUY PRENTISS WATERS, Ph.D is Associate Professor of New Testament Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson, Mississippi.

ENDNOTES

1. Herman N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1953), p. 186; John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way* (BST; Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP, 1968), pp.132-3. Partly Paul has in mind that the New Covenant believer is freed from any burden of having to keep the ceremonial requirements of the Mosaic Law (Gal. 5:2; see also Gal. 4:8-11; Acts 15:10), so John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians and Ephesians* (repr. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), pp. 146-7; and James Fergusson, *An Exposition of the Epistles of Paul to the Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians* (repr. Evansville, Ind.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, n.d.), pp. 84-5.
2. The Westminster Larger Catechism states this point well.

Q. 97. What special use is there of the moral law to the regenerate?

A. Although they that are regenerate, and believe in Christ, be delivered from the moral law as a covenant of works, so as thereby they are neither justified nor condemned; yet besides the general uses thereof common to them with all men, it is of special use, to show them how much they are bound to Christ for his fulfilling it, and enduring the curse thereof in their stead, and for their good; and thereby to provoke them to more thankfulness, and to express the same in their greater care to conform themselves thereunto as the rule to their obedience.
3. It is sometimes asked why Paul did not quote the summary of the first table of the law, ‘You shall love the Lord your God with all of your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind’ (Matt. 22:37). The likely reason is because Paul is addressing a situation in Galatia where professing Christians are in danger of ‘biting and devouring one another’ (Gal. 5:15). Reminding the Galatians of the second table of the law is therefore a pressing pastoral concern. Recall that the Scripture teaches that we cannot love others without loving God, just as we cannot love God without loving our neighbour (1 John 5:2; 1 John 4:20). To reference one of these two summary statements, then, is necessarily to reference the other. See Matthew Poole, *A Commentary on the Holy Bible* (3 vols.; repr. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, n.d.), 3:657.
4. I have been greatly helped in this treatment of James 2 by Jonathan Edwards, “True Grace Distinguished From the Experience of Devils,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (Edward Hickman, (ed.); 2 vols.; 1834; repr. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1974), 2:41-50.