

Galatians 2:16

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Analysis

Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. This verse is the theological heart of Galatians, stated with threefold emphasis. The participle eidotes (εἰδότες, "knowing") indicates settled conviction. The passive verb dikaioutai anthrōpos (δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος, "a man is justified") uses dikaiōō (δικαιόω)—forensic declaration of righteousness, God's verdict of "not guilty."

The contrast is absolute: ouk...ex ergōn nomou (οὐκ...ἐξ ἔργων νόμου, "not from works of law") versus dia pisteōs Iēsou Christou (διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, "through faith of/in Jesus Christ"). The prepositional shift—ek (ἐκ, from/out of) versus dia (διά, through/by means of)—shows law-works cannot be the source, only faith in Christ. The phrase pistis Iēsou Christou can mean "faith in Jesus Christ" (objective genitive) or "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ" (subjective genitive)—likely both: we trust in the faithful work of Christ.

The climactic conclusion: ex ergōn nomou ou dikaiōthēsetai pasa sarx (ἐξ ἔργων νόμου οὐ δικαιωθήσεται πᾶσα σάρξ, "by works of law shall no flesh be justified"),

quoting Psalm 143:2. Πᾶσα σάρξ (πᾶσα σάρξ, "all flesh") is universal—no human being, whether Jew or Gentile, achieves right standing with God through law-keeping. Justification is by faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone.

Historical Context

This statement overturned centuries of Jewish self-understanding. Torah observance was how Jews maintained covenant relationship with God. Paul insists the law was never meant to justify but to reveal sin (Romans 3:20). Christ's perfect obedience and atoning death accomplished what the law demanded but could never produce—complete righteousness credited to believers through faith. This doctrine sparked the Reformation 1,400 years later.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. What "works of law" are you tempted to trust in for acceptance with God rather than resting in Christ's finished work?
2. How does the complete exclusion of works from justification protect both God's holiness and our assurance?
3. What difference should the truth that "no flesh" can be justified by works make in how you view yourself and other believers?

Interlinear Text

εἰδότες ὅτι οὐ δικαιωθήσεται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων
Knowing that no be justified a man by the works
G1492 G3754 G3756 G1344 G444 G1537 G2041

νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦν Χριστοῦ καὶ ἡμεῖς
of the law G1437 G3361 by the faith Jesus Christ and we
G3551 G1223 G4102 G2424 G5547 G2532 G2249

εἰς Χριστοῦ Ἰησοῦν ἐπιστεύσαμεν ἵνα δικαιωθήσεται ἐξ
in Christ Jesus have believed that be justified by
G1519 G5547 G2424 G4100 G2443 G1344 G1537

πίστεως Χριστοῦ καὶ οὐ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου διότι οὐ
the faith Christ and no by the works of the law for no
G4102 G5547 G2532 G3756 G1537 G2041 G3551 G1360 G3756

δικαιωθήσεται ἐξ ἔργων νόμου πᾶσα σάρξ
be justified by the works of the law G3956 flesh
G1344 G1537 G2041 G3551 G4561

Additional Cross-References

Philippians 3:9 (Faith): And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith:

Psalms 143:2 (Righteousness): And enter not into judgment with thy servant: for in thy sight shall no man living be justified.

Romans 9:30 (Faith): What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

Romans 4:2 (Righteousness): For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

1 Peter 3:18 (Righteousness): For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:

1 Peter 2:24 (Righteousness): Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripes ye were healed.

Romans 1:17 (Faith): For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Romans 3:30 (Faith): Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

2 Peter 1:1 (Faith): Simon Peter, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

1 John 1:7 (References Jesus): But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.