

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 *dikaioō* (δικαίω)—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 δικαιοθήσεται πᾶσα σὰρξ, "by works of law shall no flesh be justified"),

quoting Psalm 143:2. Pasa sarx (πᾶσα σὰρξ, "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

Psalms 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			by	the faith	Jesus	Christ	and	we
G3551	G1437	G3361	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	σὰρξ			
be justified	by	the works	of the law		flesh			
G1344	G1537	G2041	G3551	G3956	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.