

## Lesson 8 – Galatians 2:15-21

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### Review/Introduction

The Galatian churches were in danger of abandoning salvation from sin by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Christ plus anything is a different, distorted gospel. As a slave of Christ, Paul must speak when the gospel is in jeopardy. As slaves of Christ we must speak also.

Paul started his defense by showing that the gospel that he preached, the true gospel, was not learned from other people nor found in Scripture-invalidating tradition nor did he invent it. He received it directly from the Lord Jesus.

The evidence that the gospel that Paul received was divine revelation was the dramatic change in his life. God changed Paul from persecutor to preacher, from slave to sin to slave of Christ. Only the gospel of grace can make new, not the non-gospel of works. Paul's dramatic change from persecutor to preacher, from slave to sin to slave of Christ, demonstrate the power of the gospel. The result of God's work in Paul's life was that God is glorified.

Paul did not get the gospel from the apostles, but was welcomed as an apostle with the same gospel as the apostles. Paul's confrontation of Peter demonstrated his equality with the other apostles and that the Judaizers were enemies of the gospel.

The threat of a different, distorted gospel is as real today as it was in Paul's day. Surely, this is true in cults and liberal churches. But it can be true with us too. All who come to Christ are tempted to bring, or perhaps to revert to, a works-based mentality to their new relationship with Christ. A Christ plus rules mentality for salvation (in the fullest since which includes sanctification) is something that must be rejected.

Paul is writing to the Galatians defending the doctrine of justification by faith alone. They are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Last time we looked at Paul's confrontation with Peter regarding hypocrisy that demonstrates a powerless non-gospel instead of a powerful gospel of grace. Today, we see how Paul uses this confrontation of Peter to launch into the theological defense of justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

This section not only crystallizes the essence of the gospel of grace versus the counterclaims of the Judaizers, but it also serves as the major hinge in the letter. It prepares for a following exposition of justification by faith alone by clearly stating Paul's thesis.

## Paul's defense of his slavery to Christ –

### Paul's authoritative message – justification by faith (2:15-21)

#### 1. The insufficiency of the law (2:15-18)

<sup>15</sup>“We *are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; <sup>16</sup>nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. <sup>17</sup>But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! <sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

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<sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. <sup>17</sup>But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. (ESV)

The first interpretive challenge we see here is whether verse 15 is a continuation of Paul's quote addressing Cephas or if it begins Paul's expounding on justification.

The NASB, NIV, and NKJV take the quote to the end of the chapter. But the ESV, NET, HCSB end the quote at verse 14. Verses 15-16 form a single long sentence in the Greek which seems to point to Paul ending the quote then going into justification. Either way, verses 15-16 are Paul's succinct explanation of justification.

One thing we do know is that Peter responds righteously to Paul's confrontation. He turns from hypocrisy and behavior repudiating the gospel. We see Peter's declaration at the Jerusalem Council.

<sup>7</sup>After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. <sup>8</sup>And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; <sup>9</sup>and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. <sup>10</sup>Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? <sup>11</sup>But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are.” (Acts 15:7-11)

We also see that Peter does not hold a grudge. Towards the end of Peter's life, we see him refereeing to Paul as “our beloved Paul” and acknowledging his apostolic gifts and that he was moved by the Spirit to write Scripture.

<sup>15</sup>and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also **our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him**, wrote to you, <sup>16</sup>as also in all *his* letters, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which the untaught and unstable distort, **as *they do* also the rest of the Scriptures**, to their own destruction. (2 Peter 3:15-16)

#### ❖ **How do you respond when confronted about hypocrisy?**

*All Scripture are from the NASB '95 Update unless noted.*

*Most word studies are from preceptaustin.org, blueletterbible.org, and biblehub.com*

Addressing those that believe salvation comes from Christ plus works, or those whose hypocrisy represents that, Paul notes that either group are Jews by nature (birth – ESV). Elsewhere, Paul says how the Jews are advantaged due to their position of knowledge of God.

<sup>1</sup>Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the benefit of circumcision? <sup>2</sup>Great in every respect. First of all, that **they were entrusted with the oracles of God.** (Romans 3:1-2)

<sup>1</sup>I am telling the truth in Christ, I am not lying, my conscience testifies with me in the Holy Spirit, <sup>2</sup>that I have great sorrow and unceasing grief in my heart. <sup>3</sup>For I could wish that I myself were accursed, *separated* from Christ for the sake of my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh, <sup>4</sup>who are Israelites, **to whom belongs the adoption as sons, and the glory and the covenants and the giving of the Law and the *temple* service and the promises,** <sup>5</sup>**whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to the flesh,** who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. (Romans 9:1-5)

They are Jews by birth who have access to the means of justification by grace through faith in the Scriptures.

### ❖ How do you respond to God’s word?

The advantages of the Jews are different than the “Gentile sinners” (ESV). The ESV is the literal Greek. “Sinners” are not a subset of Gentiles. From the Jewish mind’s perspective, all Gentiles are sinners, or not chosen Israelites.

Nevertheless, the Jewish believers should all know (e.g., Genesis 15:6; Habakkuk 2:4) that they are “not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified”.

“Justified” is used four times in verses 16-17. It was originally used of a judge’s verdict declaring an accused person not guilty and right before the law. It was the opposite of being declared guilty and condemned. The concept of justification and the means of justification is one of the deciding doctrines of orthodoxy.

We do not want to confuse “regeneration” with “justification”. Regeneration is God’s work that imparts new spiritual life (2 Corinthians 5:17; John 3:3; Titus 3:5). God regenerates (John 1:13) instantaneously as he wills (James 1:18) by the Holy Spirit (John 3:5).

Regeneration is God’s work in you. Justification is God’s judgment about you.

Justification is the gracious, instantaneous work of God (Romans 8:33) where the repentant, believing sinner is declared righteous. Your sins are placed on Christ (1 Peter 2:24) and His righteousness is placed on you (2 Corinthians 5:21). God’s righteousness moves Him to be just and the justifier through faith of all those whom He calls to Himself (Romans 3:21-26).

Some say a way to think of “justification” is “just as if I never sinned”. But that really misses the point. Christ’s righteousness is placed on you, so a better way to think of it is “just as if I was always righteous”.

MacArthur and Mayhue in “Biblical Doctrine” define justification as “that instantaneous act of God whereby, as a gift of his grace, he imputes to a believing sinner the full and perfect righteousness of Christ through faith alone and legally declares him perfectly righteous in his sight, forgiving the sinner of all unrighteousness and thus delivering him from all condemnation.”

Grudem in “Systematic Theology” defines justification as “An instantaneous legal act of God in which He (1) thinks of our sins as forgiven and Christ’s righteousness as belonging to us, and (2) declares us to be righteous in his sight.”

<sup>32</sup>He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things? <sup>33</sup>Who will bring a charge against God’s elect? **God is the one who justifies;** (Romans 8:32-33)

<sup>24</sup>and **He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross**, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed. (1 Peter 2:24)

<sup>21</sup>He **made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf**, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)

<sup>9</sup>and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the **righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith**, (Philippians 3:9)

<sup>19</sup>For as through the one man’s disobedience the many were made sinners, even so **through the obedience of the One the many will be made righteous.** (Romans 5:19)

<sup>21</sup>But now apart from the Law *the* righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, <sup>22</sup>even *the* righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, <sup>24</sup>**being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus;** <sup>25</sup>whom God displayed publicly as a propitiation in His blood through faith. *This was* to demonstrate His righteousness, because in the forbearance of God He passed over the sins previously committed; <sup>26</sup>for the demonstration, *I say*, of His righteousness at the present time, **so that He would be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.** (Romans 3:21-26)

A person is not declared righteous by the works of the law. No rejection of evil, good deed, selfless act, or religious observance justifies. Only true saving faith in Christ.

Christ offers salvation from sin (Colossians 2:13-14) to all who exercise the gift of true saving faith (John 3:16), turning from their sins (Hebrews 6:1) and surrendering their life to Christ (Luke 9:23-26; John 10:27-28), trusting only in Him for salvation from sin (John 1:12; Ephesians 1:7; 2:8-10; 1 Peter 1:18-19); forsaking any merit of good works, organizational membership, religious observance, or heredity.

❖ **Are there things that you either outrightly or practically add to Christ?**

The Spirit through Paul is laying out an argument of by grace through faith and not works.

Negative

knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law

Positive

but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and

Negative

not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Not by works but by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!!!

“By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” led Paul to address a Judaizers claim. The Judaizers apparently taught that grace leads to licentiousness, therefore, law is needed. Paul’s point is that it is not Christ’s fault that those saved by grace through faith should sin. Christ is not causing the sin, it is the individual believers who choose to sin.

❖ **Do you blame anyone for your choice to sin?**

Such an idea about Christ is heretical. “May it never be” means “God forbid” or “may it not be thought of.” Moving back to the law (rebuilding what you once destroyed) will only demonstrate the inability of the Law to save and show one to be a transgressor of Law (someone who sins).

❖ **Are there thoughts about Christ and justification that “should never be” for you?**

2. The new life in Christ (2:19-21)

<sup>19</sup>For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

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<sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. (ESV)

Christ is not a minister of sin when a believer chooses to sin. Paul says the same in Romans.

<sup>1</sup>What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin so that grace may increase? <sup>2</sup>May it never be! How shall we who died to sin still live in it? (Romans 6:1)

“Through the law” comes the knowledge of sin.

<sup>20</sup>because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law *comes* the knowledge of sin. (Romans 3:20)

❖ **Do you use your own ideas a standard for sin or God’s word?**

That knowledge of sin moved you to surrender your life to Christ by grace through faith and in that moment, you were regenerated and justified, but also baptized into Christ. You spiritual died and were united with Christ in His death and resurrection.

<sup>3</sup>Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? <sup>4</sup>Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. <sup>5</sup>For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, (Romans 6:3-11)

Verse 20 gives great theological and practical truths of the walk of faith with Paul again saying the similar things in Romans 6.

<sup>6</sup>knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with, so that we would no longer be slaves to sin; <sup>7</sup>for he who has died is freed from sin. <sup>8</sup>Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, <sup>9</sup>knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, is never to die again; death no longer is master over Him. <sup>10</sup>For the death that He died, He died to sin once for all; but the life that He lives, He lives to God. <sup>11</sup>Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

The reason you have died to the law and now live to God is that you have been “crucified with Christ”. “Crucified” points to a criminal’s death for sin. You died with Christ because of sin, you were crucified with Christ.

Now you are united with Christ in His death and resurrection, so theologically, you no longer live. Theologically (and very practically) you have access to Christ’s power since Christ lives in you.

The believer’s life of faith is not about living “for” Christ, but Christ living “through” you.

### ❖ How do you view “living by faith”?

So, what is “living by faith in the Son of God”? This is walking in the Spirit. God has described Spirit-filling (Ephesians 5:18+) in the Scriptures in several ways. He has done this to allow us to understand the deep truths of Spirit-filling. Spirit-filling is described as “abiding in Christ” in John 15:1-11. It is described as “setting apart Christ as Lord in your heart” in 1 Peter 3:15. It is described as “living by faith in the Son of God” in Galatians 2:20. It is described as “presenting your bodies a living and holy sacrifice” in Romans 12:1-2. And it is described as “letting the words of Christ to richly dwell within you” in Colossians 3:16.

Living by faith (walking in the Spirit) is turning from sin (not grieving the Spirit).

<sup>29</sup>Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such *a word* as is good for edification according to the need *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear. <sup>30</sup>**Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup>Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. <sup>32</sup>Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you. (Ephesians 4:29-32)

Living by faith (walking in the Spirit) is yielding to God's words (not quenching the Spirit). You "quench" or "stifle" the Holy Spirit when you are in rebellion against what God says. When you despise God's word. "Despise" is a strong verb which means to disregard or reject with contempt something on basis it is worthless or of no value. Even if you do not "despise" God's word actively you can still treat it as worthless by not yielding to it.

<sup>16</sup>Rejoice always; <sup>17</sup>pray without ceasing; <sup>18</sup>in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. <sup>19</sup>**Do not quench the Spirit;** <sup>20</sup>**do not despise prophetic utterances.** <sup>21</sup>But examine everything *carefully*; hold fast to that which is good; <sup>22</sup>abstain from every form of evil. (1 Thessalonians 5:16-22)

<sup>16</sup>**Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you,** with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16)

The motivation for living by faith is out of gratitude for what Christ has done for you. He "loved you and gave Himself for you".

<sup>28</sup>Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, **let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe;** <sup>29</sup>for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28-29)

#### ❖ Are you motivated by gratitude to live by faith?

"Nullify" means to regard as nothing, to declare invalid, to act as though it were annulled to spurn, to despise. By returning to law or thinking that righteousness comes through the law (i.e., justification – the Greek noun form of "to justify"), grace is declared invalid or despised. Works for salvation or sanctification declares invalid grace because in that case, Christ died needlessly. If people could be justified by works, then Christ died needlessly.

#### ❖ In what ways do you nullify grace?

### Conclusion

The Galatians are in danger of abandoning justification by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. Paul did not learn the gospel from other people nor Scripture-invalidating tradition nor did he invent it, but he received it directly from the Lord Jesus. Paul's dramatic change from persecutor to preacher, from slave to sin to slave of Christ, demonstrates the power of the gospel. Paul was welcomed as an apostle with the same gospel as the apostles. Paul's confrontation of Peter demonstrated his equality with the other apostles and that the Judaizers were enemies of the gospel. The great doctrinal truth of justification leaves no room for law/works because it treats disdainfully grace.

## **Additional Study**

1. Read Galatians once this week a chapter at a time (one chapter a day for six days).
2. Today's Questions
  - Do you have competing ideas in your mind/heart with grace and faith.
  - Think about “justification” and our sins being placed on Christ and his righteousness being placed on us. Give thanks.
  - Are you trying to rebuild works in your life?
  - Are you living by faith in the Son of God?
  - Are you nullifying grace?