



SERMON STUDY GUIDE

Galatians 2:15–21

Questions for the Week: How does God transform believers to look like Jesus? What kind of actions, words, and lives look like the divinely intended “image of God”?

READ THE TEXT – Galatians 2:15–21

The Structure

Paul’s Response to Peter’s Hypocrisy (Gal 2:14–21)

1. Rhetorical Question: “If you while being a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to *Judaize*?” (Gal 2:14)
2. Paul Reminds Peter of Established Tradition (Gal 2:15–16)
 - 2.1. We [Peter and Paul] are Jews and not from Gentile sinners (2:15)
 - 2.1.1. Gentile “sinners” because
 - 2.1.1.1. Impurity (Leviticus 18–26, esp. 18:24–30; Ezra 9:1–2; 10:10–11; Neh 10:30)
 - 2.1.1.2. Sexual Immorality (Lev 18:1–30; 20:10–21)
 - 2.1.1.3. Idolatry (Lev 20:1–5; see also Deut 21:31; 18:9; 32:16–17; 2 Kgs 16:3; Ps 106:37–39)
 - 2.1.1.4. Jewish texts identify Gentiles as naturally predisposed to sin due to idolatry (esp. Isa 44:20; Jer 10:1–16)
 - 2.1.2. Meals with Gentiles are problematic because of idolatry (Acts 10–11, esp. Acts 10:28; 11:2; Dan 1:8–16; 1 Cor 8–10; Rom 14:1–23)
 - 2.1.3. Sets up the rhetorical question of Gal 2:17
 - 2.2. Knowing the source of justification (Gal 2:16; see Gal 3:11; Rom 3:20, 28; Psalm 143:2)
 - 2.2.1. A human is not justified from works of law but through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ (2:16a; 3:8, 24; see also Rom 3:30; Phil 3:9; Eph 2:8–9)
 - 2.2.2. We trusted in Christ Jesus (2:16b)
 - 2.2.2.1. In order that we might justified
 - 2.2.2.1.1. From faithfulness of Christ
 - 2.2.2.1.2. Not from works of law
 - 2.2.2.2. Because from works of law all flesh will not be justified (Gal 2:16c)
 - 2.2.3. not works of law but faithfulness of Christ (2:16)
3. Rhetorical Question – “If we seek justification in Christ and found sinners then is Christ a servant of sin?” (2:17)

- 3.1. If by finding justification “in Christ” and then being found as “sinners,” that is among impure Gentiles, is Christ a servant of sin? Paul will argue that conclusion is only coherent if the aim of being with Gentiles is to make them into Jews (rebuilding again what I tore down [Gal 2:18]). Paul argues that the aim is not to turn Gentiles into Jews, as was already agreed in Jerusalem (Gal 2:1–10)
- 3.2. Answer: NO WAY (2:17)
4. Paul’s Argument Explaining the Logic of why “Works of the law” cannot Justify:
 - 4.1. If I rebuild what I destroyed, I show myself a transgressor (2:18)
 - 4.1.1. Former behavior (Gal 1:13–14; Phil 3:6)
 - 4.2. Participation in Christ’s Death (2:19–20)
 - 4.2.1. Through the law I died to the law in order that I might live for God (Gal 2:19; see Rom 6:10; 7:4, 6; Phil 3:7)
 - 4.2.2. I have been crucified with Christ (Gal 2:19; Rom 6:6, 8)
 - 4.2.3. I no longer live but Christ lives in me (Gal 2:20; see also Rom 8:10–11; 14:7–9; Phil 1:21)
 - 4.2.4. what I now live in flesh, I live by trust (Gal 2:20; see also Phil 1:22)
 - 4.2.4.1. in the son of God (Gal 2:20; see also Rom 1:1–4; Gal 4:4; Matt 16:16)
 - 4.2.4.1.1. who loved me (Gal 2:20; see also Rom 5:10)
 - 4.2.4.1.2. gave himself for me (2:20; see Gal 1:4; 1 Cor 11:24–25)
 - 4.3. Logic of Jesus’s Death as alternative to “works of the law” (Gal 2:21; see also Gal 3:21–22)
 - 4.3.1. I do not set aside the grace of God
 - 4.3.2. If righteousness is through law (as Peter’s actions suggest)
 - 4.3.3. Then Christ died for nothing (which is nonsense).

Questions this Week:

- What does the phrase “works of the law” mean?
 - The phrase “works of law” appears only in Galatians and Romans (Gal 2:16 [x 3]; 3:2, 5, 10; Rom 3:20, 28; 4:2, 6; 9:12, 32; 11:6) and has spurred significant debate about its precise meaning. The most important issue for the meaning of this phrase for Christian theology is what it means for Paul’s theology of grace and human effort.
 - Does “works of the law” refer to “human achievement” or “legalism.” According to this paradigm, “works of the law” human efforts to merit salvation. What Paul opposes when he talks about “works of law,” according to this view, is any attempt to earn righteousness by human effort.
 - Does “works of the law” refer to the practices of the Torah, especially the Sabbath, food purity, calendar, and circumcision?
 - Paul can use “Law” and “works of law” interchangeably (e.g. Gal 2:21; 3:11, 12; 5:4), all in reference to the Law of Moses. In his attacks on “works of the law,” Paul

refers to the necessity of doing the “works of the law” (Gal 3:10–12; see also Rom 4:10–12) and “the whole law” (Gal 5:3). Paul also specifies that circumcision is a form of keeping the “law” (Gal 6:13). The closest parallel in Jewish scripture is Exod 18:20. In this passage, the Mosaic Law reveals “the works, which they [i.e. Israel] will do.”

- What does the word “Justify” mean?
 - The verb is usually translated “justify” or “make righteous” and related to the adjective “righteous” and the noun “righteousness.”¹ In Jewish scripture, the verb “justify” has a variety of related meanings related to the idea of what is *deserved* (Tob 12:4).
 - As a relational term indicating *fidelity* to covenant obligations like marriage (Gen 38:26; Jer 3:11; Ezek 16:51–52).

Then Judah acknowledged them and said, “She is *more in the right* [δεδικαίωται] than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” And he did not lie with her again. (Gen 38:26)

- A social term for *justice* in coming to the aid of the oppressed and elect (Ps 82:3; Isa 1:17; 45:25; 50:8)

Learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, *plead for* the widow. (Isa 1:17)

⁷ The Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced; therefore I have set my face like flint, and I know that I shall not be put to shame; ⁸ *he who vindicates* me is near. Who will contend with me? Let us stand up together. Who are my adversaries? Let them confront me. (Isa 50:7–8)

- A legal term referring to *acquitting* the innocent or righteous (Gen 44:16; Deut 25:1; Exod 23:7; 1 Kgs 8:32 see also Isa 5:23; 43:26)

Suppose two persons have a dispute and enter into litigation, and the judges decide between them, *declaring one to be in the right* [δικαιώσωσιν τὸν δίκαιον] and the other to be in the wrong. (Deut 25:1)

- The verb “justify” is especially important to Paul’s arguments about the law in Romans and Galatians
 - Romans 15x (Rom 2:13; 3:4, 20, 24, 26, 28, 30; 4:2, 5; 5:1, 9; 6:7; 8:30x2, 33)
 - Galatians 8x (Gal 2:16x3, 17; 3:8, 11, 24; 5:4)
 - “Justified” as future **acquittal** of the righteous in judgment (Rom 2:13)

¹ The adjective “righteous” occurs 79 times in the NT, 7 times in Romans (Rom 1:17; 2:13; 3:10, 26; 5:7, 19; 7:12) and 10 times elsewhere in Paul’s letters (Gal 3:11; Eph 6:1; Phil 1:7; 4:8; Col 4:1; 2 Thess 1:5, 6; 1 Tim 1:9; 2 Tim 4:8; Titus 1:8). The noun “righteousness” occurs 92 times in the NT, 34 times in Romans alone (Rom 1:17; 3:5, 21, 22, 25, 26; 4:3, 5, 6, 9, 11[x2], 13, 22; 5:17, 21; 6:13, 16, 18, 19, 20; 8:10; 9:30[x3], 31; 10:3[x3], 4, 5, 6, 10; 14:17), but only 4 times in Galatians (Gal 2:21; 3:6, 21; 5:5).

- God is “**justified**” even when humans are unfaithful (Rom 3:3)
- Because humans are unfaithful “works of the law **do not justify**” (Rom 3:20, 28 // Gal 2:16–17; 3:11; 5:4)
- Humans are justified “from faith” (Rom 3:26, 30; 4:5; 5:1; Gal 2:16; 3:8, 24)
- Elsewhere in Paul’s letters (1 Cor 4:4; 6:11; 1 Tim 3:16; Titus 3:7)
 - Paul is not “acquitted” because he has a clear conscience (1 Cor 4:4)
 - Paul argues that the Corinthians must live righteous lives because they “were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God” (1 Cor 6:11)
 - Jesus was “vindicated” in the resurrection (1 Tim 3:16)

What can we conclude about Paul’s meaning of “justify”?

1. “Justify” has a forensic meaning of **acquittal** on the day of judgment (Rom 2:13; 5:9; Gal 2:16; 1 Cor 4:4; see also Acts 13:38–39)
2. Paul’s view, he thinks this is not a new idea unique to his theology, is that the acquittal is
 - a. Not based on “**works of the law**” (Gal 2:16; 3:11, 24; Rom 3:28)
 - b. Based on “**trust of Jesus**” as a source of forgiveness and salvation (Rom 3:24; 5:1, 9; Gal 2:16; 3:8, 24).
3. Justification is not a “Legal fiction,” it involves the transformation of believers (Rom 6:7, 12–14; 8:30; 1 Cor 6:11; see also James 2:14–26, esp. 2:21)

⁹ Do you not know that *wrongdoers* [unjustified] will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived! Fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, male prostitutes, sodomites, ¹⁰ thieves, the greedy, drunkards, revilers, robbers—none of these will inherit the kingdom of God. ¹¹ And this is what some of you used to be. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and in the Spirit of our God. (1 Cor 6:9–11)

Weekly Questions:

- What does this passage say about God?
- What stood out to you from the text this week?
- What does this text say about the Lord’s reign and what it means to be his set apart people?
- Who are the characters of this story?
- What does this passage invite us to:
 - Do?
 - Think?
 - Feel?
- How did the sermon or passage encourage you to Love God and Love People?
- Which characters do you identify with most in the story? Why?