

Galatians 2:15–21
“A Thesis for Gospel Theology”

Why This Passage Matters:

- All passages are profitable (2 Tim 3:16)
- Most passages are important (2 Tim 3:17, 2 Peter 1:3)
- Several passages are foundational (Galatians 2:20)

Galatians 2:15–21 answers one foundational question:
“How does a sinner become right with God?”

Context:

Paul has just confronted Peter for withdrawing from Gentile believers.

Peter’s actions implied that faith in Christ was not enough.

Paul responds by explaining justification clearly and uncompromisingly.

We will see that Galatians 2:15–21 is:

- Paul’s theological conclusion to the confrontation with Peter (2:11–14)
- The clearest articulation of justification by faith in the letter
- A linguistic transition from biography to doctrine
- This paragraph functions as the thesis statement for everything Paul will argue in the coming chapters. (Which will be a series of arguments.)

Passage:

15 “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 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. 17 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! 18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 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. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.” (Galatians 2:15-21 NABS95)

Outline:

NO ONE IS JUSTIFIED BY THE LAW (VV. 15-16)

Justification changes our standing before God, not our immediate behavior. It answers the question: On what basis does God accept me?

Mentions the “works of the law” three times in one verse.

“Works of the law” = obedience to Mosaic law as a means of acceptance

GRACE DOES NOT PROMOTE SIN (VV. 17-18)

“Is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!”

The objection is anticipated by Paul:

“If law doesn’t justify, then sin doesn’t matter.”

Paul doesn’t deny the danger of sin, he denies the *conclusion*. Grace never makes sin acceptable; it makes righteousness possible. (Supporting Text: Romans 6)

DEAD TO THE LAW, ALIVE IN CHRIST (VV. 19-20)

Now Paul moves to the heart of the passage, and arguably the heart of Christian theology.

“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.”

He is saying:

“I died to the law with the purpose and result that I would live to God.”

English forces us to say “might,” but Greek doesn’t carry uncertainty here, instead it carries design.

The law does one thing perfectly: it condemns.

But Paul says something **shocking**:

“I have been crucified with Christ.”

This is not poetry. This is union.

This is not Jesus helping Paul live a better life.

This is Jesus living His life through Paul!

GRACE OR NOTHING (V. 21)

If obedience completes justification, the cross is unnecessary
If law supplements grace, the cross is emptied
If righteousness can be earned, Christ's death is pointless
This is why Paul will not compromise. This is not arrogance, it is fidelity.
Grace plus anything is not grace improved. Grace plus anything is grace denied.

The Christian life does not begin with effort and end with grace.

It does not begin with grace and end with effort.

It starts. And ends. With grace.

Table Talk: (Then open-floor discussion)

- Why do so many Christians struggle to believe that faith alone is sufficient?
- How can legalism feel safer than grace?
- What does it mean that Christ lives in you?
- How does obedience change if we remember identity comes before effort?
- How does grace make discipleship easier? How does it make it harder?

Final Summary:

We are justified by faith alone, united with Christ completely, and empowered to live, not to *earn* righteousness, but because we already have it. The Christian life begins with grace and continues by grace, so that our lived experience here on Earth can reflect more and more the truth of who we are in Christ.

Are we discipling people into freedom: or subtle performance?

Do our systems reinforce grace or reward law?

Supporting Texts:

Romans 6:1-7 – Theological sibling to Galatians 2:15-21. Galatians is defensive and logical. Romans is expansive and pastoral.

Philippians 3:7-9 – Paul's personal application of Galatians 2 truth! (mini Autobiography)

Colossians 2 and 3 – Life HIDDEN IN CHRIST!