

GALATIANS

THE FREEDOM OF THE GOSPEL

The Gospel is for All - Galatians 2:11-21

SMALL GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

*(Leaders, please use these questions **as a guide for discussion**. Please don't feel like you have to go through every one!)*

Connect: How does knowing that the gospel is God's message, not a human invention, change the way you: trust Jesus, resist false teaching and/or share the gospel with others?

Warm-Up

1. Can you think of a time when you felt like you had to prove yourself in order to be accepted? What did that feel like?

Read Galatians 2:11-14

2. Why does Paul publicly confront Peter? What was Peter doing, and why was it such a serious issue?
3. Peter never denied the gospel with his words. How were his actions denying the truth of the gospel?
4. What barriers or divisions can Christians unintentionally create today? How can these communicate the wrong message about the gospel?
5. Verse 14 says Peter's conduct was "not in step with the truth of the gospel." What does it look like for our lives to stay in step with the gospel?

Read Galatians 2:15-21

6. What does it mean to be 'justified'? Why do we need it?
7. According to verses 15–16, how is a person justified before God?
8. Why do you think people naturally drift towards believing that they must earn God's acceptance?
9. If salvation depended on your own good works, could you ever have assurance that you had done enough? Why or why not?
10. What does Paul mean when he says, "I have been crucified with Christ"?
11. Verse 20 says, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me." How should this shape the way Christians think about everyday life?
12. Paul reminds us that Jesus "loved me and gave himself for me." Why is it important to remember both Christ's love and his sacrifice?
13. What does Paul mean when he says that if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died for nothing?
14. What are some modern-day ways Christians can subtly rely on "works" instead of Christ?

Apply

15. This passage teaches that there are "no exclusions" for those who come to Christ in faith. How can our church better reflect that truth in its welcome, fellowship, and ministry?
16. Where do you most need to be reminded that your standing before God depends on Jesus rather than your own performance?

PRAY: *Gracious God, thank you that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone. Thank you for the great assurance and freedom that we have in your grace and love. Help us to reject pride and performance based Christianity and welcome others without partiality. We pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.*

TITLE: The Gospel is For All

PASSAGE: Galatians 2:11-21

LOCATION: St John's Wishart 9AM

BI: We are saved completely through faith in Jesus Christ, not through works or the Law

AIM: For people to be reminded of the freedom that we have in being justified from the penalty of sin through faith in Jesus Christ.

STRUCTURE:

- 11-14: No Exclusions
 - 15-16: Justified by Faith
 - 17-20: Through Christ
 - 21: Not through the Law
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- Last week in our series in Galatians, we started off with the question of how do you know that something is true.
 - We saw with complete clarity that the Gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians was completely true, that it was from God and not man made or from the imaginations of someone. Paul isn't the Apostles second-rate lackie either!
 - And this week, Paul continues to defend himself and his message.
 - Because now we turn to the question of how can you be sure of something?
 - How can you be sure of something?
 - I'm pretty sure that the Broncos aren't going to win another premiership this year
 - I'm pretty sure that Australia is going to be at the top of the table in the Glasgow commonwealth games...
 - I'm pretty sure that the roof isn't going to fall in on top of us this morning; and
 - I'm pretty sure that no amount of coffee can cover the sleep deprivation of having a 5 month old and a 2 year old!
 - I'm sure of all of these things because of the evidence!
 - Broncos are nowhere in the table; Australia is far out ahead.
 - The roof hasn't fallen in in the past 36 years that this building has stood; and
 - Despite having 4 coffees in the day, I'm still regularly wanting to fall asleep at my desk at 3PM
 - But how can you have assurance of something even more important than these things?
 - How can we have assurance of something of infinite more importance, something that's actually eternal?
 - How can we be sure of being saved? How can we be sure of our right standing with God? How can we be sure of our sins being forgiven? Sure of our justification?
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- The classic assumption that people make about Christianity is that it's all about trying to earn your way into heaven.
 - You know, just try and do good stuff to outweigh the bad stuff; go to church, give to charity, help old ladies across the Street and THEN you might be let into heaven.
 - Sadly, I know of Christians who believe this as well! They hope that they've done enough, the hope that they've proved themselves to God, they hope that they have given enough money, prayed enough, read enough of the bible, baked enough casseroles for the neighbours - in order that God might just let them into heaven when they get to the pearly gates.
 - They hope that their good works might justify them. Might make up for the bad stuff that they've done.
 - Does this sound familiar to anyone? Maybe you've had friends or family members tell you that they hope they've done enough?
 - But if this is the basis of your salvation - your good works - how can you ever be sure that you're good enough?
 - If the basis of your salvation is what you do - how can you be sure that you do enough?
 - There is no assurance in that at all. No certainty!
 - But thanks be to God - that isn't the case. That isn't what God has left us with.
 - Because as we'll see today - a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Christ Jesus.
 - The basis of our assurance and hope isn't what we do or who we are...but on what Christ has done for us.
 - There are no exclusions...those who turn to Christ are Justified By Faith In Christ - Not Through the Law
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- **No Exclusions**

- So if you remember last week, we got a bit of a travel itinerary from Paul?
- We saw his conversion, his first trip to Jerusalem to chat to Peter, and then his second trip to Jerusalem to chat to the Apostles and get their confirmation and then he went on his way?
- Well - now we continue tracing Paul's journeys - and he gets to Antioch and meets Peter there.
- And what happens next is a real clash of the titans - Remember Cephas is just the aramaic name for Peter.
- V11 "But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy."
- So here's the situation:
 - Peter is a disciple of Jesus - followed him around, was one of his closest mates. And Peter is a Jew.
 - After Jesus' death and resurrection, Peter became almost like a spokesperson for the original Apostles!
 - In Acts 10 the Jewish Peter is given a vision where he is told to eat all kinds of food that were typically unclean and forbidden for Jewish people to eat.
 - And then meets up with a Centurion called Cornelius (who was a Gentile) and goes into his house and eats with him.
- Now, there were a range of views in the Jewish 1st Century about how to relate to Gentiles. Some were more flexible, but others believed that you shouldn't go into a Gentiles house, you shouldn't approach them...you certainly shouldn't eat with them!
 - Almost as if the non-jewish people were dangerous!
- But Peter, remember a Jew, is told by God - to go and eat with Gentiles. Go and eat the things that were in the past considered unclean. Go and share the gospel with them!
- And Peter goes along with it.
- However, some years down the track, Peter had been drawing back from eating with Gentiles because of pressure from some other people.
 - Who these people from "James" are - we can't be sure, but we can gather from Paul's argument, that they were trying to get the Jewish believers to separate themselves from the Gentiles!
- And in the first century, who you ate with was important. It publicly declared who you were friends with, who you aligned with, who you supported, who are your buddies.
- It symbolised deep fellowship.
- But now - Peter has started to decline invitations to Gentile believers' houses. He's been separating himself from them because he feared the people who were trying to convince them to segregate once again. These are the circumcision party.
 - He wanted their approval, he wanted to keep up appearances with them!
- And it's not only Peter but other jews as well, and even Paul's companion Barnabus!
- Paul writes that they are all hypocrites! They are all play-acting. Believing one thing but going and doing another!
- Why? What's at stake here? Why is Paul including this in his letter?
- Because what Peter is doing in his actions of withdrawing from the Gentiles - is denying the truth of the Gospel.
- In his actions - Peter is communicating something to the gentile believers. His exclusion is communicating that they aren't good enough for him, and that they needed to do something more in order to have fellowship with other believers.
- By withdrawing from the people who were different from him - he's communicating that the gentiles have to adopt jewish behavior and traditions in order to be saved.
- In a sense - he's communicating that Jesus' death isn't enough! That Gentiles need to be circumcised, they need something extra to be the real deal and to be in the in-crowd.
- That's why Paul confronts Peter!
- Because the truth of the Gospel is that there are no exclusions for anyone who comes to Jesus.
- It doesn't matter someone's background, nationality, language, ability, disability, record of sin, age, gender, relationship status, education level, tax bracket, housing situation - anyone who repents and turns to Jesus can be fully saved and brought into full relationship with other believers - no exclusions, because we are all justified by faith in Christ Jesus, not be who we are! That's why Paul confronts Peter:

- V14 “But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”
- How can Peter try to force the gentiles to adopt Jewish behaviour when he still had some Gentile behaviours that he adopted even though he was Jewish by birth?
- No - any boundary, any barrier, or any exclusion that we might make either intentionally or unintentionally, is not in step with the truth of the Gospel!
- Because we are all saved not through who we are, but by Faith in Christ.
- **Justified by Faith**
- V15 “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 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.
- Paul
- The Jews were the ones who had the Law. They had the marker of who was in and who was out. The Law was the code given to the nation of Israel to mark them out as God’s People!
- However, Paul is writing here - that both Peter and Paul (who were Jews not Gentiles without the Law) knew that you couldn’t be justified or made right with God through just doing the law!
- They knew that the way to have your sinful slate washed clean wasn’t through human actions or deeds or rule following. They knew that the way to salvation was not simply by living in a Jewish manner -
- But the way to be justified is through faith in Jesus.
- Simply through faith in Jesus Christ - not through Law Works.
- Before we plough on, it’s worth looking at what Justification actually means.
- It’s a legal term.
- The opposite of justification is condemnation.
- To condemn someone is to declare them guilty.
- To justify someone is to declare them not guilty or innocent or righteous.
- Our problem is that because of our rebellion against God or our disregard of him or disobedience, we would be destined for condemnation. For punishment!
- But God has offered us an opportunity to be declared not guilty - to be justified!
- And it’s not through law following.
 - *Now I’m no expert on this or health guru - so please don’t take any advice from me on the following matters...*
 - *But if you want to lose weight, it’s really not that complicated. Just put out more energy than you put into your body.*
 - *You will then be in a deficit, meaning that you will at some point in time start losing weight.*
- And some people think that salvation is like that! Like its some kind of spiritual workout - that as long as you do enough works - then you can “Burn off” all the bad stuff that you’ve done - and then you’ll be right! Then you’ll have a clean slate!
- But Paul says no.
- By the works of the law - no one will be saved. He repeats that three times in the space of these verses just to drum it into our dull and prideful heads!
- But we can only be justified through faith in Christ.
- That is, we can only be saved by giving our whole selves over to him. By turning away from living for ourselves and putting our trust in him. Totally depending on him! Running to him for mercy!
- That’s the only way we are justified.
- Sometimes though there can be a tendency to slip back into works-based thinking though.
- Sometimes we can think that somehow we top-up or add to our salvation.
 - God look at how much I give; God look at my achievements for you; God look at how much i serve on the roster at church; God look at my ministry and God look at my shiny bible college degree!
 - Sometimes we can think that God has a big cosmic star chart going on!
- But no - these add nothing to our salvation. Our only hope is in Jesus.
- No exclusions. We are justified though faith IN CHRIST.

- In Christ

- Now Paul imagines that some of his opponents may have some questions at this point.
 - Paul is now saying that you don't have to be Jewish in order to be saved. Jews are free to drop some of the Jewish traditions and in fact they should drop them in order to have full table fellowship with non-Jewish people!
 - So then, his opponents might say at this point - *Aha! You're all acting like Gentile sinners, you're all acting as if you don't have the Law. So then, Jesus is serving sin! Jesus is enabling sin to happen! Gotcha Paul!*
- But Paul says - definitely not.
- It's not sinful to eat with Gentiles. So Jesus isn't serving sin or enabling sin to happen. But it would be sinful to NOT eat with the Gentiles.
- It would be sinful to rebuild the barriers that were fulfilled and torn down by Jesus.
- It would be sinful to insist on the way of the Law which could never save people.
- 17 "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! For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor."
- And all this change - comes through the death of Jesus.
- V19 "For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 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."
- It's in Jesus' death that the law was fulfilled. The law's demand of sacrifice and death was fulfilled in the death of the one who lived out the law perfectly!
- And Paul writes - that we have been united to Jesus in his death and resurrection.
- Which means that the law's demands now have no hold on us. We don't need to adopt any extra practices to be saved. Anyone can come to Jesus and be saved.
- And then be given a whole new life.
- A new life that's given to Jesus and lived in faith to Jesus. Trusting in him. Giving our whole lives over to him.
- We no longer live. We no longer have kingship over our lives, but instead, Christ lives in us. Christ has given his Spirit to us.
- And so we live for him.
- We aren't forgiven in order to keep on sinning - we are forgiven in order to live for Jesus.
- Craig Keener writes in his commentary on Galatians along these lines: we have complete safety and security in giving our lives over to Christ, because he gave his life for us.
- There are no exclusions. We are justified by faith in Christ - not through the Law.

- Not Through the Law

- V21 "I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose."
- IF we could possibly be justified through law following - through adopting Jewish practices, then Christ suffered in vain as we'll look at in more depth next week.
- So then - how can you be sure of your salvation? How can we be sure of our justification?
- Well we can't look at our own works. We can't be saved by our own good deeds or law-following or brownie points.
- We aren't saved by ethnicity or who we are!
- But we can only run to Jesus. That's how we can be sure of our salvation.
- In his death, he took the curse of the law on our behalf.
- He loves us. He willingly laid down his life for us. He took away our sin. He cleansed us. He made us right with God! Because of his once for all death on the cross - we now stand in a state of Justification! We have been justified and we are justified.
- And so on that last day when we stand before the throne, we will be declared - NOT GUILTY...JUSTIFIED through Jesus' endless grace and mercy.
- If you want this assurance and this salvation...this freedom from guilt and shame...it can all be yours today.
- It doesn't matter who you are, or what you have done. There are no exclusions! All that you have to do is turn away from your sin and turn to Jesus. And this hope and certainty is yours.