

Walk Worthy

November 17, 2024

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

Galatians 2:15-21

Session Outline

1. Justified by Jesus (Galatians 2:15-16)
2. New Identity (Galatians 2:17-18)
3. Walk Worthy (Galatians 2:19-21)

Theological Theme

Regardless of what you do, who you are, or the traditions you follow, the only way to be justified or declared righteous before God is through faith in Jesus Christ. Once people experiences salvation through faith, their lives should reflect that they live for God.

Call to Action

Believers are called to examine their lives consistently and to walk worthy to represent their new identity in Christ.



Leader Guide

Walk Worthy

Introduction

Looking at others to consider how we measure up is a normal part of daily life. Whether you are on social media deciding if your life is as good as someone else's or watching a coworker to see if you are producing as much as he or she is, comparisons come naturally. Sometimes the people you compare yourself to make you feel inadequate or insecure while other times you feel better about yourself.

But we are not called to compare ourselves to others for the standard of living. Instead of tracking other people's lives, the Lord has given us the only standard that matters. It can be tough to resist the urge to judge by the world's standards in some areas, and it is especially troublesome when we're tempted to use the wrong scale of evaluation in our faith. This is what happened with the church in the first century and, as we study what Paul wrote to one body of believers, we will see the present-day application as well. Spiritually speaking, we can fall into the comparison trap and wind up in the wrong mindset just like the church Paul wrote to in Galatians.

- ❓ When are you most prone to compare yourself to others?
- ❓ How can such comparisons be harmful or even dangerous in our Christian walk?


Session Summary

A great change takes place when a person places his or her trust in Jesus as Savior. Recognizing that all have sinned and fallen short then believing in the sacrifice Jesus willingly made on the cross to redeem us from sin leads to new life in Him. Paul sent the church in Galatia instructions about how to walk worthy of the new identity they received through their faith in Christ. The way we live our lives should reflect the reality that we are new creations in Christ.


1. Justified by Jesus (Galatians 2:15-16)

This portion of Galatians 2 is connected to a confrontation between Paul and Peter about Peter's inconsistency with different groups of people. Both men were raised in the Jewish faith, which meant that they were very familiar with the law and had been taught that following the law was everything. But Jesus changed everything and broke down the wall that previously divided the Jews and Gentiles.

Even then, people tended to fall into the comparison trap. Jews might compare themselves to Gentiles and develop arrogance because they had more religious background. A possible danger was placing their faith in their religious tradition or upbringing and not in Jesus. Jews were raised with a great respect for the law, but once Jesus came and completed His work on the cross, the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles was torn down.

 Why might Jews have taken a posture of pride over the Gentile believers in the early church?

No one is declared righteous by the law but through Jesus Christ. Paul wanted to make clear what was necessary for gospel transformation. A person's standing with God is not dependent on their ability to keep the law, as this is impossible for anyone outside of Jesus. Anyone who has ever tried to follow the law without mistake knows the futility of attempting perfection by our behavior and actions to earn salvation. But because of the perfect life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, the way of salvation has been opened to all.


 Why is it crucial to understand that no one can earn salvation through keeping the law? Why is this something we naturally want to do?

The word justified is important. It is a legal term meaning, "declared righteous." Justification implies a favorable verdict in a court of law. We do not do things to be "made righteous" but by the blood of Jesus we are "declared righteous." Taking the courtroom imagery further, being justified is about receiving a favorable verdict on the day of judgment. This happens as we put our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, not in ourselves or our efforts.

Paul spoke strongly to the problem with this kind of thinking by proclaiming no flesh is justified by the law. He emphatically stated neither Jew nor Gentile could earn salvation by good works of the flesh.


The Context of Paul's Argument

This section not only crystallizes the essence of the gospel of grace versus the counterclaims of the Jewish false teachers, but it also serves as a major hinge in the letter. The argument appears to either continue or emerge directly out of Paul's face-off with Peter at the end of the long preceding autobiographical portion. It also prepares for the following exposition of justification by faith alone by stating the central thesis to be proven.

 Application: Where does a sense of “earning” creep into your view of relationship with Jesus?


2. New Identity (Galatians 2:17-18)


Christ, not the rules of the law, had become the center of Paul’s life. He lived with the constant realization that Christ loved him and proved that love by giving Himself for Paul on the cross. To behave in a way that denies God’s grace is like saying Christ died for nothing. To attempt to add works of the law to Christ’s sacrificial death is to make a mockery of His crucifixion. When we live by faith, we realize Christ lives in us and our sinful natures are defeated. Our motivation for obedience comes when we pursue Christ for Himself and allow Him to work through us.

 What does this verse say about the ongoing struggle against the flesh in the life of a Christian?

Paul asked a rhetorical question, “If we are united with Christ, does our struggle with sin make Christ a part of our sin?” He emphatically answered that question with a strong “Absolutely not!” (v. 17). We are all still sinners while we walk this earth. Yes, we are justified by faith in Christ and not by our works, but we still sin. A Christian is not a perfect person without sin but a person who has faith in Christ; therefore, God no longer holds that person’s sin against him or her.

Paul compared this to building back what had previously been torn down. Christ came to tear down the dividing wall between Jews and Gentiles so all might know the way of salvation. To require the Gentiles to live according to Jewish law was to build back the wall of division. Ironically, those who did the rebuilding would be the law breakers! It would be sin to go back to the way of thinking before Jesus came because it would be like saying Jesus’s work on the cross was not enough to save us. This is the trap of legalism that Paul stood against.

 What are some ways we try to add to the finished work of Jesus, even if we don’t realize it?

 Application: How can you focus on trusting the finished work of Jesus over your own works?

3. Walk Worthy (Galatians 2:19-21)

In these verses, Paul made a striking statement about following Jesus and still trying to live by the law. He said those who trust in Christ have died to the law and to rely on the law for salvation is equal to saying that Christ's death was unnecessary. It is difficult to imagine a more dangerous posture to take.

- ❓ How does following Jesus make us dead to the law? Does this mean we don't have to worry about living holy lives? What does it mean?

Paul knew the questions the church was facing, and he didn't shy away from tackling even the toughest ones. Paul stressed that by trusting the work of Jesus on the cross, he was also crucified with Christ. Since it was the sin of people that Jesus died for, those who identify with Jesus died spiritually with Him on that cross. And just as He was raised, so we have been raised with Him to live a new life.

- ❓ What does it mean to have new life in Christ?

This new life is all about faith. Paul pointed out that faith in self, the law, or anything else is futile; only faith in Christ matters because only Jesus can save us. Paul recognized the personal nature of what Jesus did by his use of the pronoun "me" when talking about the love of Christ. An important piece of following Jesus is understanding that He died for us as a body of people and as individuals. Jesus loves you specifically.




Paul re-emphasized the seriousness of not accepting the grace of God. To do so is to reject the work of Jesus on the cross and essentially say He died in vain. Just as Jesus was crucified, we have been crucified to the life we previously lived. Our old self is gone, and we no longer live according to our works. Although we still have the same physical body and face the same temptations that cause us to struggle, Christ now lives in us, and we can surrender to His power working through us. We now live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

- ❓ Application: Where do you need to receive Jesus's love for you personally?

Conclusion

Paul's words to the Galatians remind us that we too must be careful to set aside things of the past to live as the new creations we are in Christ Jesus. Though we did nothing to deserve the grace and mercy of God through the work Jesus did on the cross, we can receive it by faith. This is the gift of God to be received with thanksgiving and praise.

Paul challenged the idea that Gentile believers needed to follow Jewish law by stressing that God's unmerited favor is not in any way reliant upon keeping the law. It is impossible to keep the law on one's own strength and attempting to do so rejects the finished work of Christ on our behalf. In return, we strive to live in a manner that is worthy of Jesus Christ so that we bring Him the glory He so richly deserves.

-  What does it look like for you to walk in a manner worthy of Christ each day?
-  Where might you be trying to earn salvation instead of relying on the completed work of Christ in your place?
-  How will living in a manner worthy of the gospel give us opportunities to share about Jesus with others?

Prayer of Response

Thank Jesus for His love for you and the sacrifice He made on the cross so you could receive the gift of salvation. Confess anything you need to crucify so that you will be a better witness. Commit to sharing your faith with others you meet this week.

Memory Verse

I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. — Galatians 2:20

Additional Resources

- *Holman New Testament Commentary: Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, & Colossians* by Max Anders
- *Galatians for You* by Timothy Keller
- *Exalting Jesus in Galatians* by David Platt and Tony Merida

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of Galatians

Purpose

Galatians was written to clarify and defend “the truth of the gospel” (2:5, 16) in the face of a false gospel. This was done by: (1) defending Paul’s message and authority as an apostle, (2) considering the Old Testament basis of the gospel message, and (3) demonstrating how the gospel message Paul preached worked practically in daily Christian living. Paul chose this approach to correct those in the Galatian churches in regard to both their faith and practice related to the gospel.

Author

The author’s name is “Paul,” and he claims to be “an apostle” of Christ (Gl 1:1). The autobiographical information in the letter is consistent with what is known about the apostle Paul from Acts and his other letters. Theologically, everything in Galatians agrees with Paul’s views elsewhere, notably in Romans.

Setting

It is not certain where the Galatian churches were located or when Paul wrote Galatians. The reason is that, during the New Testament era, the term Galatians was used both ethnically and politically. If “Galatians” is understood ethnically, the founding of the Galatian churches is only implied in the New Testament. On Paul’s second missionary journey, he “went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia” (Ac 16:6) in north central Asia Minor (near Ankara, the capital of Turkey). His later visit to the same general area is recorded in Acts 18:23 and 19:1. This is where a group from Gaul (modern France) invaded in the third century BC, and it became known as Galatia.

Special Features

Galatians, which may be the earliest of Paul’s letters, is also his most impassioned. It gives us a strong presentation of the truth that sinners are justified and live godly lives by trusting in Jesus alone.

Extended Commentary

Galatians 2:15-21

2:15 Theologically, Paul knew all people (not just Gentiles) are sinners (Rm 3:23). He was likely using a phrase Gentile sinners that his opponents, who were Jews by birth and apparently conceited about it, used to describe non-Jews. But because of God's gracious covenant with Israel, the Jews did have certain spiritual advantages (Rm 9:4–5).

2:16 Justification is a legal idea, meaning “to be declared (not made) righteous.” Faith means trusting in the redemptive work of Jesus Christ on the cross. When Paul speaks of the message we ... believed, the plural “we” may refer to: (1) “all the brothers” with Paul at that time (1:2); (2) Paul and the Galatians, who believed when they first heard Paul's preaching (3:2); or (3) both.

2:17 Paul's opponents in Syrian Antioch and Galatia were apparently depicting his message of being justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone as “lowering” Jews spiritually to the level of being sinners, which somehow would make Christ ... a promoter of sin (i.e., by making Jews common “sinners”). Paul's response to this preposterous idea was the strongest possible negation—absolutely not!

2:18 Having believed a law-free gospel of justification by faith, Paul could not go back and rebuild the false gospel message (salvation through “the works of the law”; v. 16) he previously had torn down. If he did this, he would be a lawbreaker in the sense of sinning against grace.

2:19–20 Paul meant by his statement through the law I died to the law that because Jesus died under the law (3:13), Paul was now separated from the law. I died refers to being crucified with Christ, as if the believer died on the cross with Jesus. The Christian continues to live physically, but spiritually this new life is by faith in Christ.

2:21 If it were possible to gain God's righteousness through keeping the law, the death of Christ on the cross would have been for nothing, but since salvation via the law is not possible, the only alternative is justification by faith in Christ.¹

References

¹ A. Boyd Luter, “Galatians,” in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1860–1861.