

Galatians– Embracing Grace and Truth

Facilitated by Sister Patricia Weaver

 828 7580 6094 ▶ Thursday April 30, 2026

Women of Excellence

Bible Study 7pm

Memory Verse

Galatians 2:19-20 (ESV) ¹⁹ 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.

PAUL’S DOCTRINE

Galatians 2:14–16 (NLT)

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel message, I said to Peter in front of all the others, “Since you, a Jew by birth, have discarded the Jewish laws and are living like a Gentile, why are you now trying to make these Gentiles follow the Jewish traditions? ¹⁵ “You and I are Jews by birth, not ‘sinners’ like the Gentiles. ¹⁶ Yet we know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be made right with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law.”

POINT 1 - HIS REACTION

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to

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live like Jews? We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles. (2:14–15) NASB

As already noted, the withdrawal of the Jewish believers from the Gentiles was likely gradual; but as soon as Paul realized what was happening, he immediately reacted against it. **When [he] saw they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel**, he sharply rebuked Peter (**Cephas**). As an apostle Peter was the most accountable, and it was his wrong example that had drawn the others into the destructive hypocrisy.

Straightforward means to walk straight, or uprightly. One scholar translates verse 14a as, “They were not walking on the straight path towards the truth of the gospel.” In withdrawing from their Gentile brethren, Peter and the others were not living parallel to God’s Word, not walking a straight spiritual course.

Because Peter’s offense was public, Paul rebuked him **in the presence of all**, unmasking his hypocrisy before the whole congregation. Every believer in Antioch, and doubtlessly many unbelievers as well, knew that Peter was no longer associating with Gentiles as he had once done so freely and openly. Augustine said, “It is not advantageous to correct in secret an error which occurred publicly.” Unless the public sin of a believer is dealt with publicly, people will think the church does not take sin seriously and therefore gives tacit approval of it. A church that does not discipline sinning members (including the most prominent members) loses its credibility, because it does not take seriously its own doctrines and standards. A child who is not disciplined when he does wrong soon concludes that his parent’s standards are not really very important, because they are not enforced.

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After taking care to determine by several witnesses that a charge against an elder is true, Paul told Timothy, the elder should be rebuked “in the presence of all, so that the rest also may be fearful of sinning” (1 Tim. 5:20). Paul’s rebuke of Peter shows that no Christian leader, regardless of his stature, is beyond discipline by the Body. Public sin demands public rebuke.

“If you, being a Jew,” Paul said, “**live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?**” In contrast to Peter’s hypocrisy, Paul’s indictment was straightforward. He simply pointed out the obvious inconsistency of Peter’s behavior in Antioch. He reminded him that when he first arrived there, Peter had freely fellowshiped with Gentile believers and regularly ate with them (v. 12). He had openly visited in their homes and joined them in love feasts and Communion, showing no evidence of legalism or prejudice. He had lived **like the Gentiles and not like the Jews**, who were known throughout the world for their separatism.

After his vision of the unclean animals and his experience with Cornelius, Peter had no longer lived **like the Jews**, having finally come to realize that even the God-given ceremonial separation taught in the Old Testament was no longer valid. But under the influence of the Judaizers in Antioch he faltered and slipped back into the old ways. When the winds of legalism blew in, he adjusted his sails accordingly and was blown along with them.

Paul had no desire to lord it over Peter or to build up his own reputation at the expense of a fellow apostle. His motive was not to humiliate Peter but to correct him in a serious error that had caused many other believers to stumble with him.

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He could tolerate nothing that threatened the integrity of the gospel, especially if that threat came from a prominent and influential leader such as Peter.

Discussion Questions

- 1. “If you, being a Jew,” Paul said, “live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”**
- 2. What did Paul say in response to Peters hypocritical behavior?**
- 3. What did Paul say to those who were Jews by birth?**
- 4. Why do you think it’s easier for Christians to live by rules and traditions than by faith?**

POINT 2 - HIS STATEMENT

We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 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, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. (2:15–16)

The heart of man’s spiritual dilemma is that he is incapable of overcoming the total sinfulness that separates him from the holy God. Job’s friend Bildad asked,

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“How then can a man be just with God?” (**Job 25:4**). How can a guilty and condemned sinner be made righteous and thereby acceptable to God? The provision of justification by faith is God’s answer to that dilemma and need.

Paul’s rebuke of Peter culminated in one of the most forceful statements in the New Testament on the doctrine of justification—the very doctrine that Peter and the others were in effect renouncing by their hypocritical separation from Gentile believers. In effect, Paul was saying, “Peter, I am rebuking you because you are violating the cardinal truth of Christianity. By your behavior you are condoning works-righteousness, a system of legalism that is contrary even to the covenant given by Moses, not to mention the New Covenant given by our Lord Jesus Christ.”

We is used four times in verses 15–17 and refers to Paul, Peter, and all other Jewish Christians. The first part of his argument here is that, even **we who are Jews by nature ... have believed in Christ Jesus**. “As Jews,” he was indicating, “we of all people know what it is to live by the system of law. We know the law as a way of life, what it is to function continually under the demands of religious rituals and regulations. Yet even **we** were saved by believing **in Christ Jesus**, not by the law. And if **we**, as **Jews**, cannot be saved by the law, how can we expect **sinners from among the Gentiles** to be?”

In referring to **the Gentiles** as **sinners**, Paul was not using the term in the behavioral sense of public immorality (as it is often used in the gospels), but in the legal sense in which it was frequently used by Jews. In the minds of most Jews, Gentiles were **sinners** by nature because they had no law to guide them in right living and in pleasing God. But with or without the law, Paul was saying, no person is saved who has not **believed in Christ Jesus**.

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Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, Paul continues, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified. (2:16)

No amount of law-keeping can make a person righteous, because the root of sinfulness is in the fallenness of man's heart, not in actions. Man's basic problem is in what he is, not in what he does. Sinful acts are but the outward expression of a depraved nature that contains sinful thoughts. A person who hates is inwardly a murderer, whether or not he ever takes another person's life (Matt. 5:22). A man who has immoral thoughts about women is an adulterer, whether or not he ever commits the physical act of adultery (5:28).

Consequently, no amount of **works of the Law** can save a person, because even the best of human works cannot change the nature of the person doing them. "We know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, that every mouth may be closed, and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight" **(Rom. 3:19–20)**. The law is important as a mirror to show us our sinfulness; but it can only reveal sin, not remove it. "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe; for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.... For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law" **(3:21–24, 28)**.

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Only **faith in Christ Jesus** can bring a person the gracious gift of righteousness that provides forgiveness and salvation. **Faith in Christ** is not mere intellectual assent to the fact that Jesus died and rose for man's sin but is personal trust in His death to remove and forgive one's own sins. It is total commitment to submit to Him as Lord (cf. James 4:7).

Three times in Galatians 2:16 Paul declares that salvation is only through faith in Christ and not by law. The first statement is general: **a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus**. The second is personal: **even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law**. The third is universal: **by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified** (cf. Ps. 143:2). All three affirm the same great reality.

All claims that salvation is through belief in Jesus Christ plus something else are blasphemous, satanic lies. There can be no effective or acceptable human addition to Christ's work. This passage is as forceful and unequivocal a statement of the doctrine of salvation by faith alone as can be found in Scripture. First Paul establishes it on the basis of his apostolic authority. Second, he establishes it on the basis of his own experience. And third, he establishes it on the basis of God's Word in the Old Testament.

Discussion Questions (2:15-16)

- 1. How can a guilty and condemned sinner be made righteous and thereby acceptable to God?**

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2. If we, as Jews, cannot be saved by the law, how can we expect sinners from among the Gentiles to be?”

3. Why is justification by faith in Jesus Christ such good news for both Jews and Gentiles, and what implications does this theological truth have for the unity of the Galatian church and for how we live out our Christian unity today?

4. What stood out to you in this Lesson?

Closing Prayer