



FREE IN CHRIST • FREE THROUGH FAITH • GALATIANS 2:1-21 • 06/17/2018

Main Point

God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for Him, but through faith in Christ alone.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

In which sport(s) do you think it is most difficult to score? Why? In which sport is it easiest to score? Why?

In what ways might we as human beings try to “score points” with God?

For those of us with a competitive spirit, games in which we can score more points than our opponents are exciting. We often consider games to be worthless unless a winner is declared. We also tend to think this way about God. Many people believe they can score points with God through seemingly righteous acts, but today we will see in Galatians 2 the futility of that hope. Only Jesus is able to satisfy the requirements of the law and we receive Him only through faith. Therefore, God's pleasure in us is not based on our performance for Him, but through faith in Jesus.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

Ask a volunteer to read Galatians 2:1-10.

How would you explain Paul's goal in this situation?

How would you summarize Paul's approach? How is this different from how you might react in a similar situation?

Paul spoke to the division over Jews and Gentiles by talking about his experiences. He knew that tension existed, but he was not worried about the issue because he had spoken with the apostles, the leaders of the church in order to reach a wise conclusion. Paul knew his purpose was to spread the gospel, not to worry about circumcision. Yet Paul's spread of the gospel would inevitably lead him to confront any form of performance-driven salvation.

HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 2:11-14.

How had Peter compromised his freedom in Christ? To who or what was he enslaving himself?

How is living under the law related to living in fear of people? How are both opposed to living in freedom?

Peter lived with freedom when he was with Gentiles, but when Jews came to town, he gave up his freedom to be seen in their eyes as a good Jew who followed the law. Legalism and the fear of people seek to control our behavior and force us to fit what into what is deemed "right." The gospel says that we are free to live a life fully devoted to Christ.

HAVE ANOTHER VOLUNTEER READ GALATIANS 2:15-21.

What is the common need of both groups named in these verses? Who is the only person who can meet that need?

Why is it important to see ourselves on equal ground as those in need of salvation?

How are the words "justified" and "faith" used in the passage?

The word "justify" refers to God's creative act of grace by which He gives people who place faith in Christ a new, right standing with Him and a new way of life. In their new standing with God, they seek to reflect His character and to do His will.

According to these verses, what is the message of the gospel?

What kind of behavior would be considered consistent with this understanding of the gospel?

What does Paul say about the role of faith and works (or the law)? How are they different?

The gospel is the good news that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ and not by the works of the law. Our behavior is consistent with this gospel when it does not express prejudice toward others or insist that works lead to salvation. Paul contrasted faith and works. The apostle pointed out that observing any ritual or law is incapable of producing justification or right standing before God.

| What kind of change did Paul experience according to verses 17-21?

| What was the law's purpose? How did it set the stage for the Messiah? How then should we view the law?

When Paul stated that he died to the law, he was acknowledging God's grace and asserting that humans can do nothing to merit salvation. It was through the law that Paul had come to this position. The law revealed the inadequacy of humanity's religious efforts and exposed the depth of human sinfulness.

What does it look like to "live to God?"

What was Paul's point in verse 21? How might our lives imply that Christ died for nothing?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

How does the realization that Christ loved you and gave Himself for you change you? Is there an area in your life today that doesn't reflect that truth?

Is it easier for you to believe that someone is a Christian when he or she is culturally, ethnically, socially, or racially "like you"? Why or why not?

How can we act on Paul's reminder to the Jews about equality among all sinners? How can you help someone in your family better "live to God" this week?

Pray

Pray specifically for group members to apply the reality of God's love for them to the struggles in their lives. Pray that each person would continue to change in order to look more and more like Jesus. Pray that they would reflect on and understand what it means to daily die to self.

Commentary

Commentary

2:1. This reference to 14 years could be to a full 14 calendar years or 12 full years and fractions of the first and last. The time could look back to: (1) Paul's conversion (1:15-16), (2) Paul's previous trip to Jerusalem

(1:18-19), or (3) Paul's trip to Syria and Cilicia (1:21). Paul's relationship with Barnabas, whose name means "Son of Encouragement" (Ac 4:36), began in Jerusalem (Ac 9:27). Titus was a convert under Paul (Titus 1:4) who became an effective minister (2Co 2:13; 7:13; Titus 1:5).

2:2. Paul "presented... the gospel" he was preaching to the leaders (at least James, Peter, and John; see note at v. 9) for the sake of helpful discussion. The phrase "might not be running... in vain" reflects concern over brewing disunity in the church. Paul's meeting privately with the leaders (lit "the recognized ones") in Jerusalem makes it unlikely he was talking about the Jerusalem Council, which was larger and more public (Ac 15:6,12).

2:3-5. To make it clear that he had not adjusted his gospel message during this private conference with the church leadership in Jerusalem, Paul used Titus as a test case. Had Paul caved in to the view that had recently been preached in the Galatian churches (that it was necessary for a Gentile to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic law to become a Christian; 2:16; 5:2-3), Titus, a Gentile convert, would have been compelled to be circumcised, but he was not, reflecting the fact that Paul's gospel was accepted by the recognized church leaders in Jerusalem. "False brothers" reflects that they were not really Christians. This group heard that Paul was having private discussions about the gospel and the Gentiles, and they found a deceptive way to "crash the party" to try to curtail "freedom... in Christ" and enslave Christians to the law, which was happening in the Galatian churches (5:1). To maintain the truth of the gospel, Paul did not submit even momentarily to their argument about circumcision.

2:6. James, Peter, and John were the recognized "pillars" of the church (v. 9). "What they really were... God does not show favoritism" was not meant as disparaging to them. However, as Paul recounted in verses 11-14, he encountered problems in Syrian Antioch from: (1) those who were claiming authority from James (v. 12), and (2) Peter's hypocritical attempt to appease that group.

2:7-10. Paul was not saying in these verses that there are two different gospel messages. Rather, he had been appointed by God as the apostle to the Gentiles (Ac 22:21; Rm 11:13), and Peter served as an apostle to the Jews. God was at work in each ministry. The unity of viewpoint between Paul and the leaders of the Jerusalem church was symbolized by the "right hand of fellowship"—a common sign of friendship and agreement. "To remember the poor" was the main reason why Paul and Barnabas had made this trip to Jerusalem (Ac 11:28-30).

2:11-13. Paul had set a good example of being true to the gospel in the situation involving Titus. In contrast verses 11-13 describe an occasion when Peter was untrue to the gospel and led others into hypocritical behavior. The situation occurred in Antioch, the third largest city in the Roman Empire during New Testament times and the capital of the Roman province of Syria. It was at Antioch that believers in Christ were first called Christians.

The issue revolved around Jews and Gentiles eating at the same table. Numerous rituals and guidelines related to mealtimes had arisen within Judaism. One of these guidelines restricted Jews from having table fellowship with Gentiles who lacked the seal of God's covenant—circumcision. When Peter arrived in Antioch, he found Jewish and Gentile Christians eating together at mealtimes. Peter freely joined them in this practice, a behavior not surprising since in the situation with Cornelius, the Lord had revealed to Peter His equal acceptance of Gentiles who responded to Him in faith (Acts 11:1-18).

“When certain men came from James,” however, Peter changed his behavior and withdrew from fellowship with the Gentiles. Who were these men who came from James, the leader of the Jerusalem church? We should not assume that they were the same false brothers who earlier were demanding that Titus be circumcised (Gal. 2:3-4). Apparently, the delegation had some loyalty to James and may even have carried letters of recommendation from him. When they saw Peter fellowshiping and eating with uncircumcised Gentile Christians, they were shocked. It is not clear whether their mere presence prompted Peter's change in behavior or if they spoke directly to him. In any case, Peter “began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles.” The form of the verbs translated draw back and separate suggest that Peter gradually withdrew from fellowship meals with the Gentiles. Peter's hypocritical behavior negatively influenced those around him. Other Jewish believers also began separating themselves from the Gentiles at mealtimes. Even Barnabas, a model of Christian encouragement, was led astray!

2:14. What motivated Peter's fear that resulted in his withdrawal from fellowship at meals with the Gentiles after certain men arrived from the church in Jerusalem? Perhaps he was concerned that eating with Gentiles would put his position as pillar of the Christian community in Jerusalem in jeopardy. Maybe he was concerned that he could not effectively witness to Jews if he did not strictly observe the law? Perhaps the delegation brought news from Jerusalem that influenced Peter in some way. Regardless of Peter's reason, he stood condemned because he was “not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.” Peter was not walking a straight course. The apostle had begun wavering in his beliefs and he should have known better. The verb translated acting in line (“orthopodeo”) literally means “to be straightfooted.” Peter was acting with “hypocrisy” (2:13), not merely making an honest mistake. We have no evidence that Peter had changed his mind about salvation being available to the Gentiles, so his actions were inconsistent with his beliefs.

2:15. It is inconsistent and illogical for privileged Jews by birth, who rejected the keeping of their very own law as the way to salvation, to now burden the Gentiles with the keeping of that very same law. The phrase “Gentile sinners” was probably spoken in irony. Quite often, the Jews could not mention Gentiles without calling them “Gentile sinners.” Yet, in Paul's eyes, the sinners were the Judaizers, not the Gentile Christian believers in his church.

2:16. Verse 16 is one of the most important verses in Galatians because in it Paul states the content of the gospel of grace. This is the first time Paul uses the word “justified” which means “to declare righteous.” Justification is the act of God, whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ.

Negatively, Paul says “a man is not justified by observing the law.” Stated positively, justification is by faith in Christ Jesus. Negatively, Paul has rebuffed the false teachings of the Judaizers which Peter had supported by his behavior in Antioch. Positively, he has presented the true, grace path to righteousness.

2:17-18. The opponents to this message of grace argued that if people aren't under law then they will freely sin. They reasoned that people could believe in Christ but then live as they wanted and by their sinful actions make Christ a promoter of sin. Paul answers this accusation with an emphatic, “No!” Grace leads to freedom from sin's slavery to obey God, not license to disobey Him. A person who rebuilds (that is, returns to) the law after believing in Christ will find himself a lawbreaker. No one except Jesus can keep the law perfectly. So to put one's relationship with God on a legalistic basis is to make oneself a lawbreaker.

2:19. In verses 19–20 Paul teaches about the transformation that occurs in believers. He is continuing to correct Peter for cowering to a legalistic system that is powerless to change lives. Paul uses the death and resurrection motif in each verse. First, Paul states “through the law” I died to the law. Paul may have meant by this that, when he tried to live up to the law, he saw that it was impossible. He saw that the penalty for failing to live up to the law was death. Seeing his clear condemnation according to the law drove him into the arms of grace, to rely on Jesus to save him. Or he might have meant that, when he saw that the law was insufficient to save him, he turned his back on the law and made it no longer of any influence in his life. Or he might have meant that the law demanded death for sin. Christ died because he took our death penalty upon Himself. By believing in Christ, His death pays for the death that the law required of us. Because I am united with Christ by faith, the law killed not only Him but all who are joined to Him by faith. Therefore, the believer has died to the law. Since we have died, the law must acquit us of further punishment. So through fulfilling the law by dying in Christ, we are now free from the law. Whatever Paul meant, the result is that he no longer is under the jurisdiction of the law. It is powerless over him.

2:20. Now Paul expands upon verse 19. He died to the law (v. 19) by being crucified with Christ. He lives for God (v. 19) because Christ lives in him. Believers are in union with Christ. We are united with Him in His death, burial, and resurrection. Thus, we died with Him to the law (see Rom. 6).

2:21. Now Paul presents his conclusion. The false-teaching Judaizers were voiding the grace of God by adding the works-oriented law to the work of Christ. Therefore, Paul says “I do not set aside the grace of God” (as the legalists did), “for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!” If humans could be right with God by obeying the law, why would He send His Son to suffer and die on a cross? Paul concludes his correction of Peter by showing the utter absurdity of turning back to the law. The very reason Christ died on the cross to pay for sin was because the law could not remove sin or impart righteousness. Grace provides what the law was powerless to provide—righteousness.

Next Week's Reading

Galatians 3:1-25

