

February 6, 2022

“Joseph Transmits Abraham’s Promise”
Lesson 1 of Unit

Galatians 2:15-21

Intro

We live in a world filled with rules. There are traffic laws, like speed limits and parking areas. There are rules at work, about how to do the job, and possibly some unwritten “rules” as well. Churches can have unwritten rules as well, like how to dress or how/when to talk both before and after the service.

The Bible is a book of ethics, with rules of conduct central to the idea of ethics. It is crucial to remember that we cannot earn God’s favor by keeping rules; he doesn’t “owe us” anything when we keep the rules. This isn’t to say that keeping the rules is a bad thing—it is a very good thing to obey the laws that God has set down. Jesus even says, “He who keeps My commandments, he it is that loves me.”

But our relationship with God has to be more than just keeping the rules. If that’s all we do, then where is the room in our lives for God’s grace? We can’t earn God’s grace by keeping rules; we can only receive His grace as a gift we don’t deserve. We then try to “live by His rules” because we love Him and have a deep desire to obey Him.

Paul’s letter to the Galatians, our study for today, is about this topic. They struggled with the very idea of “keeping the law = salvation”. The Judaizers said that one must be circumcised (become a Jew) before one could become a Christian. The section we look at today is Paul’s argument against the heresy the Judaizers were teaching.

Read Galatians 2:15-21

1. vs. 15: Paul states that there is a difference between Jews and Gentiles

He puts them into different categories

The Gentiles he calls “sinners”

The Greek and Roman cultures of non-Jewish cities was lax in morality

They had few restrictions on sex, drinking, and worship

The Jews had a higher moral standard than the Greeks/Romans

Paul notes that there are “Jews by birth” who have learned/followed these morals

His reason for setting up these distinctions is developed in the next verse

2. vs. 16: There is so much going on in this verse!

Paul uses the word “justified” 3x in this verse

The word comes from the legal system

Justified legally means to be declared innocent by the judge

In spiritual terms, we have been justified by the death of Christ

We are guilty of sin, but declared not guilty by God b/c of Christ

This “justification” because of Christ is contrasted with keeping the law

Paul says people aren’t justified by keeping the law

The law is all or nothing: you do it 100% perfect or else

A person who keeps the law 99% of the time is still guilty
Paul further drives home the point by saying “by observing the law no one will be justified”
Keeping the law won’t gain you forgiveness of your faults
Paul says we are “justified by faith in Christ”—that’s the only way

Note that Paul isn’t saying, “Don’t keep the law; become a total rebel” (see next verse!)
He’s saying that keeping the law doesn’t save you
Being a “good person”, even a really good person, won’t save you

Paul is jabbing at the Judaizers, showing the weakness in their argument that one must be a Jew first, and be circumcised in order to be saved

3. vs. 17: The Judaizers argument to Paul

“If you don’t have to keep the law, then you’ll become a wild sinner like all those Gentiles”
They make it sound like this
If you don’t have to keep the law, then Christ is just encouraging sin
Paul’s answer is emphatic
“Absolutely not!” (God, may you never let this happen!)

If we are sinners, it doesn’t mean/prove that Christ encourages sin
It only means that we are still imperfect spiritually, especially compared to Christ

4. vs. 18: Paul adds on to his argument from vs. 17

Paul says here that thinking it’s OK to keep on sinning is not possible for one who is striving to live the Christian life
If a believer is freed from sin (see Gal. 5:1), and from bondage to it, why go back to it?
Paul says the one who does this proves he is a lawbreaker
This verse is a good reminder to all believers
We all sin still, even though striving to be sin-free
Our human nature wars against our spiritual nature, and sometimes wins

5. vs. 19: Paul here acknowledges that in trying to live by the law, he realized he was dead

He couldn’t keep the law (no one can)
And according to the law, whoever doesn’t keep it will die
Paul is noting that he came to understand that keeping the law wouldn’t save him
He had to “die” to the law, accept that faith in Christ alone saves
Then he was free to live for God

6. vs. 20: This is one of the most well-known, and most memorable, verses in the Bible

Paul here presents the alternative to keeping the law—being crucified with Christ
Paul is making a comparison/connection between the dying of the believer and Christ
In Rom. 6:3 he says that we were “baptized into his death”
Christ went to the cross, following the will of the Father
“Not My will, but Yours be done.”
When we are baptized into Christ, we are killing any claims we have to live the way we Please

We are “dead to sin” (Rom. 6:11)

This means that pursuing sinful desires is no longer the controlling factor for us

We may still sin, but our pursuit is Christ

Christ died for us, can calls us to follow Him

Offering our lives in service to him seems more than “reasonable” Rom. 12:1-2

7. vs. 21: Paul concludes chapter 2 with the two options

The Judaizers say that right standing with God is achieved by following the Law

Paul says that Christ died to take away sins—“the grace of God”

If the Judaizers are right, then Christ’s death was worthless; it had no value or purpose

If Paul is right, then the Judaizers are wrong

Christ’s death accomplishes justification in a way that following the law can’t

Paul refuses to “set aside the grace of God” to follow the law

If we follow rules as a way to righteousness, then we are still in our sins...

May it never be!

Application: Paul instructs followers of Christ about why choosing Christ as Savior is better than following the law. The law can’t make you right, because you can’t follow the law perfectly. Anyone that doesn’t follow it perfectly is doomed—death is the punishment. But following Christ does make you right with God, because His death took away all your sins. He offered Himself as a sacrifice for our breaking of the law; He took our deserved punishment.

There is a choice to be made here, but it doesn’t seem to be much of a contest. We can choose to follow the law, with the guaranty that we won’t be able to do it, and suffer death. Or we can choose Christ’s death as the replacement death our sins deserve, and receive grace, mercy, and life eternal. Tough decision...Not!

Prayer: Father God, forgive us for the times we have attempted to be “good enough” to gain Your favor.

Help us to serve You with all our being, and with love and gratitude for what You have done for us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.