



GALATIANS: WEEK 2

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GALATIANS

WEEK 2: Our Identity in Christ

Bible: My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So, I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. **Galatians 2:20 (NLT)**

BOTTOM LINE: Those who belong to Christ are free from the guilt of sin.

WEEK 1 SUMMARY

In week 1, we looked at how this book, "Galatians," was actually a letter written by the Apostle Paul around 49 A.D. to Christians in the region of Galatia, including the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe—all in what is the modern-day country of Turkey.

He wrote this letter in response to finding out that some Christians from Jerusalem had traveled to Galatia and were telling the believers there that, in addition to following Jesus, they needed to follow Moses and all the rules and regulations of the Old Testament, as these Jewish believers had done their whole lives.

Paul confronted this legalism, focusing on the authority he had received directly from Jesus and explained how radically that simple Good News of Jesus' mercy and grace had transformed his life, even though he, too, used to be a devout and passionate rule-following Jew.

Paul wanted the believers to get back to the truths he had taught them about Jesus when he was there, when they had first become believers.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the Christians from Jerusalem might have thought it "wasn't fair" that these Galatian Christians were not following all the rules they had from Moses and traditions they had from their Jewish ancestors?

(Have you ever felt similarly with siblings in your family?)

2. Is it ever hard for you to receive a gift? Do you ever feel like you don't deserve it?
3. Do you remember how we defined the terms "mercy" and "grace"? How are they different? How do they connect with the "Good News" about Jesus?

LESSON

Read Galatians 2 - Christ lives in us and through us.

1 Then fourteen years later I went back to Jerusalem again, this time with Barnabas; and Titus came along, too. **2** I went there because God revealed to me that I should go. While I was there, I met privately with those considered to be leaders of the church and shared with them the message I had been preaching to the Gentiles. I wanted to make sure that we were in agreement, for fear that all my efforts had been wasted and I was running the race for nothing. **3** And they supported me and did not even demand that my companion Titus be circumcised, though he was a Gentile.

4 Even that question came up only because of some so-called believers there—false ones, really—who were secretly brought in. They sneaked in to spy on us and take away the freedom we have in Christ Jesus. They wanted to enslave us and force us to follow their Jewish regulations. **5** But we refused to give in to them for a single moment. We wanted to preserve the truth of the gospel message for you.

6 And the leaders of the church had nothing to add to what I was preaching. (By the way, their reputation as great leaders made no difference to me, for God has no favorites.) **7** Instead, they saw that God had given me the responsibility of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as he had given Peter the responsibility of preaching to the Jews. **8** For the same God who worked through Peter as the apostle to the Jews also worked through me as the apostle to the Gentiles.

9 In fact, James, Peter, and John, who were known as pillars of the church, recognized the gift God had given me, and they accepted Barnabas and me as their co-workers. They encouraged us to keep preaching to the Gentiles, while they continued their work with the Jews. **10** Their only suggestion was that we keep on helping the poor, which I have always been eager to do.

11 But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. **12** When he first arrived, he ate with the Gentile believers, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. **13** As a result, other Jewish believers followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

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."*

17 *But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law. Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not! 18 Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down. 19 For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So, I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God. 20 My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So, I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die.*

Paul describes here a visit he had made to the Christians in Jerusalem—fourteen years after the visit he just described in chapter 1!

Paul shared how James, Peter, and John—three of Jesus' closest disciples and now "pillars of the church"—supported his ministry to the Gentiles or non-Jewish people.

He even shares a story about how he had to confront Peter when Peter was hypocritical of the freedom that we have in Jesus depending on who was around.

The end of this chapter is where we can really gain a lot of understanding when it comes to our relationship with Jesus.

In verse 16, Paul repeats himself for emphasis, stating very clearly that our broken relationship with God is not fixed by our obedience to any rules or regulations; instead, it is healed because Jesus took our place and died as punishment for our sins.

Because of our faith in Jesus, we can accept His gifts of mercy and grace.

We give gifts to those we love simply because we love them.

If something has been earned, it changes from being a "gift" to being a reward or a paycheck.

That's not how Paul describes what God gives us through Jesus.

That is not earned in any way.

In fact, it is the opposite of being earned since we are not getting the punishment we *do* deserve—death. In its place, we are given God's Holy Spirit living inside of us—a gift we most certainly do *not* deserve.

We're just not good enough on our own.

Paul, who had zealously tried to follow and obey God's laws, says in verse 16, "No one will ever be made right with God by obeying the law."

It's impossible!

Now, as we get to the final paragraph in this chapter, we really have to slow down.

Some of these words may be so familiar to you that they do not come across as powerful and significant as they are in this context.

In verse 19, Paul simply spells out that his attempts at obeying the law—as passionate as he was about that—were never going to work.

So, in verse 20, we read words that are familiar but so powerful: "My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me."

Paul provides a graphic description of how his old way of trying to honor God by obeying all the laws has been destroyed, using the image of a person being tortured and nailed to a cross to eventually die.

That's a graphic image that would have spoken powerfully to those first-century readers.

We are so familiar with it that we don't always get shocked by how strong the language is or how gruesome this image is that Paul describes.

He goes on to use resurrection, or "back-to-life," imagery as well.

He describes his life now as being Jesus living in him.

As a Jew, he was familiar with how the temple building was respected as a place where people worshipped God and where God's spirit would come near His people.

The language Paul uses in this passage now points to the Holy Spirit living in us.

We become a temple of the Holy Spirit which makes us a special and holy people who have received this amazing and undeserved gift of carrying God's spirit with us everywhere we go!

Paul finishes off this chapter by pointing out that he never takes this gift for granted or has second thoughts about trying to obey the law.

The fact that it is impossible to obey the law made Christ's death necessary.

Discussion Questions

1. What's the difference between getting something you have earned and receiving something that is given to you as a gift?

What thoughts go through your mind and what feelings do you have in each situation? How are they similar? How are they different?

2. List some of the things people—even Christians—try to do to earn God's love.

More specifically, what have you done to try to make God love you or love you more? (after people have shared)

What would Paul say about all of this, based on what we have read so far?

3. Iron Man has a great suit of armor, but he can only do amazing things to help people because of Tony Stark inside the armor.

How does that compare to the life of a Christian with Jesus living in us through the Holy Spirit?

Read Galatians 3:1-14 - Paul encourages to cling to their faith

1 Oh, foolish Galatians! Who has cast an evil spell on you? For the meaning of Jesus Christ's death was made as clear to you as if you had seen a picture of his death on the cross. **2** Let me ask you this one question: Did you receive the Holy Spirit by obeying the law of Moses? Of course not! You received the Spirit because you believed the message you heard about Christ. **3** How foolish can you be? After starting your new lives in the Spirit, why are you now trying to become perfect by your human effort? **4** Have you experienced so much for nothing? Surely it was not in vain, was it?

5 I ask you again, does God give you the Holy Spirit and work miracles among you because you obey the law? Of course not! It is because you believe the message you heard about Christ.

6 In the same way, "Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith." **7** The real children of Abraham, then, are those who put their faith in God.

8 *What's more, the Scriptures looked forward to this time when God would make the Gentiles right in his sight because of their faith. God proclaimed this good news to Abraham long ago when he said, "All nations will be blessed through you." 9 So all who put their faith in Christ share the same blessing Abraham received because of his faith.*

10 *But those who depend on the law to make them right with God are under his curse, for the Scriptures say, "Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the commands that are written in God's Book of the Law." 11 So it is clear that no one can be made right with God by trying to keep the law. For the Scriptures say, "It is through faith that a righteous person has life." 12 This way of faith is very different from the way of law, which says, "It is through obeying the law that a person has life."*

13 *But Christ has rescued us from the curse pronounced by the law. When he was hung on the cross, he took upon himself the curse for our wrongdoing. For it is written in the Scriptures, "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree." 14 Through Christ Jesus, God has blessed the Gentiles with the same blessing he promised to Abraham so that we who are believers might receive the promised Holy Spirit through faith.*

Paul comes across in this chapter like a parent correcting a child.

His love and passion for the people of Galatia are matched by his frustration that they are allowing themselves to be led astray.

In the very first verse, he says that the teaching they received originally about the meaning of Jesus' death was as clear as if they had been first-hand witnesses to it themselves.

And why can he say this?

Because he's the one who taught them!

He then asks and answers the question about how they received the Holy Spirit.

It had nothing to do with obeying the law and everything to do with faith in Jesus!

He describes the foolishness of trying to live free lives in the Spirit while still trying to obey the law with human effort (which he already pointed out is impossible).

Verses 5-6 echo the question and answer from verse 2: Does God do what He does in your life because of your obedience? No! It's because of your belief/faith.

It's almost comical—and maybe this is Bible geek humor—that Paul gives an example of one of the heroes of the Jewish faith, Abraham.

He points out that Abraham wasn't considered righteous or in a right relationship with God because of his obedience, but because of his faith!

He goes on in verses 8-9 to point out that God's goal all along was to create one large, multi-ethnic family relating to Him based on faith, just like Abraham.

It's never been about obedience or about being part of the genealogy of Israelites.

It's about God bringing all people of all ethnic groups into a right relationship with Him because of their faith—not because of their human ability to obey.

Verses 10-12 show Paul doing all that he can to stress that, if someone depends on the law to be made right with God, then *perfect* obedience is required.

Since that is not possible for anyone to do, the best option is to choose to accept the gift based on what God has done for us through Jesus to make us right with Him when we couldn't do it ourselves.

The last two verses of this section emphasize Jesus and what he did to take our punishment so that we could be given the gift of freedom.

Paul has spent this entire section reviewing the basics of faith and emphasizing to these Galatian Christians that following the bad teaching of the Jerusalem Christians is only going to lead to failure and frustration instead of the freedom they had been experiencing from the true Good News of Jesus that Paul had originally taught them!

Discussion Questions

1. Have you ever had a parent, coach, or teacher yell at you, not so much out of anger, but out of frustration and love because they knew you had greater potential or that you knew the wise thing to do and had chosen foolishly? Describe that.
2. Part of the Good News is that Jesus' death and sacrifice was for all people, not just the Jews.

By trying to obey the law, these Galatian Christians were reversing this Good News and going back to the way things used to be when it was all about human effort.

How do you see your peers or adults doing something similar when it comes to their faith?

3. Have you ever questioned something your parents have always told because you heard something different from a teacher or someone online/ on social media?

How do you discern when this is wise or when it is foolish like the Galatians?

Read Galatians 3:15-22 - God's promises are eternally enduring

15 Dear brothers and sisters, here's an example from everyday life. Just as no one can set aside or amend an irrevocable agreement, so it is in this case. **16** God gave the promises to Abraham and his child. And notice that the Scripture doesn't say "to his children," as if it meant many descendants. Rather, it says "to his child"—and that, of course, means Christ. **17** This is what I am trying to say: The agreement God made with Abraham could not be canceled 430 years later when God gave the law to Moses. God would be breaking his promise. **18** For if the inheritance could be received by keeping the law, then it would not be the result of accepting God's promise. But God graciously gave it to Abraham as a promise.

19 Why, then, was the law given? It was given alongside the promise to show people their sins. But the law was designed to last only until the coming of the child who was promised. God gave his law through angels to Moses, who was the mediator between God and the people. **20** Now a mediator is helpful if more than one party must reach an agreement. But God, who is one, did not use a mediator when he gave his promise to Abraham.

21 Is there a conflict, then, between God's law and God's promises? Absolutely not! If the law could give us new life, we could be made right with God by obeying it. **22** But the Scriptures declare that we are all prisoners of sin, so we receive God's promise of freedom only by believing in Jesus Christ.

This section might be easier to understand if you were a lawyer.

Paul describes contract or covenant terms in the agreement between God and Abraham.

He showed how the original agreement of blessing from God was based on faith and would be passed down through one descendant: Jesus.

That agreement was not changed when God gave laws to Moses.

The laws were always intended to be temporary while the original agreement with Abraham was eternal.

That leads to a natural question that Paul poses in verse 19: "Why was the law given?"

In typical Paul fashion, he answers his own question.

The law was given to show people their sin—to show them their need for a Rescuer and how impossible it was to rescue themselves by their good works.

Think about it. Someone who is drowning can't save himself.

He needs a lifeguard to save him.

Someone in a burning building can't put out the fire and escape.

She needs firefighters to do that for her.

He ends this section by pointing out that freedom through Jesus was always the plan.

The law was just there to remind people of their need and God's promise for a Rescuer until He arrived.

And he arrived in Jesus!

Discussion Questions

1. Is there a family tradition or valuable item that gets passed on in your family from one generation to the next?

Whether there is or you just have to imagine there is, how hard would it be to wait for your time to inherit that item or tradition?

2. God's promise didn't change all the way from Abraham to Jesus to us today. How are you encouraged by the knowledge that God can be trusted, even when we can't trust ourselves or other people?
3. Have you ever heard a little child say something like, "I want to do it myself!" or "I want to do it all by myself!" Maybe you've even seen a video of you saying that when you were young. We look at children like that and think to ourselves *How silly they are! It would be easier for them if they would just let someone help them.* How do we do the same thing with our faith?