

Galatians 2:15-21
The Foundation of a Relationship with Christ
Discussion Guide

Galatians 2:15-21

¹⁵ We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 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. ²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

The theme in Galatians over and over is that no work can ever justify us before God. Only faith in Jesus Christ is sufficient to make us right before God.

What is remarkable about Christians is how we so easily slip back from pure faith in Christ to religious works as a means of justification. Paul is pushing back against the tendency to enter into a relationship with Christ by faith but attempt to maintain that relationship by following the law.

The imagery of crucifixion is crucial (pun intended) to understanding why there is no element of law-keeping that gives us a relationship with Christ. The complete and total fulfillment of the law was accomplished with the crucifixion of Christ. There is nothing that can possibly be added to Jesus' work. When we accept union with Christ, symbolized through our baptism, that means that we are also crucified with Christ (v. 20). Our old nature is dead, and our new nature lives by faith in Christ.

To go back to religious law-keeping is to deny our new nature and identity in order to cling to the self that died with Christ. It makes no sense and actually denies who we are in Christ.

Yes, there are actions and ways of living that identify us as children of God. But the point of those actions is not the action, but the identification with Christ. Going back to the imagery of the cross, we could make a comparison of three people who wear a cross with the same style, the same size, and in the same manner. Outwardly, you can see nothing different about the way these three people wear the cross. But if you knew their motives, you would know that only one of these people are identifying with Christ.

Person #1- The cross is a stylish symbol that goes very well with the recent fashion trends. Christians are OK people, so if I get identified culturally with them as a group, that is OK as well.

Person #2- The cross is a good-luck charm because it is something associated with Jesus. Jesus brings good things to people, so I want to have this cross in the case that God might notice it and grant me favor.

Person #3- My identity is based on the salvation I have received by faith that Jesus died on the cross for my sins. I'm already known by Jesus, so this cross does not demonstrate anything about my faith toward God. Yet I love Jesus and I want to be reminded of him throughout the day. The symbol of the cross helps to remind me of who I am in relationship to him.

- **Have you ever made your relationship with Christ about something other than Christ?**
- **How do you describe the difference between religion and a relationship with Christ?**
- **What makes religion so attractive to us as human beings?**
- **What are some ways that we confuse symbols of faith with faith itself?**
- **In our do-goodism, how is it possible to make doing good the point of our action instead of doing good because we love Christ?**
- **How do you notice this shift in your own heart?**
- **What can you do to safeguard your heart motives in enjoying knowing Christ so that it remains about knowing him and not doing good to impress him?**