

Grace Didn't Die
Christianity is a Relationship not a Religion.
Galatians 2:15-21

Introduction: A religion is a system of rules and practices that are followed in order to make a person feel they are living in a way that satisfies God, their god or gods. If you follow the rules and the practices then you can have confidence that your appeasing God/the gods and thus increasing your chances of a blessed life, and depending on that religion's perspectives, increasing your assurances of the quality of your life after death.

Religion gives people tangible rails to run on. It gives them a formula that they are in charge of. What you get out of it is entirely up to how much you put into it.

People who are good at practicing religion generally feel they have purpose in life; they experience confidence and peace. In many religions people who are good at it also find acceptance from others. They have a tribe that they have earned the right to be in and thus feel confident, secure and justified to be in it.

However, even if a person is good at religion, if they are also self-aware, then they are understand both their ability to fail and consequence of failing. Failure necessitates guilt and shame and that it be born long enough to earn the right to come back, if there can even be any coming back.

A relationship is totally different. A relationship is not without expectations and standards, but a relationship isn't based on my performance. The goal of a relationship is not to earn the right to be in it, but rather to prosper in it because you have it. Relationships provide you with all the things religion promises but can't provide, and does so with a foundation that's not based on you, but the other persons willingness to love you. Therefore, when it comes to a relationship with God, His commitment to love you becomes the most the substantial foundation in the universe!

There's so much we can say on this subject here, but the rest of our study of Galatians is going to give us ample time to flesh it out and apply it. As a matter of fact, today's passage in our study of Galatians frames up the main doctrines we are going to be talking about and learning to apply over the next few months. Specifically,

Proposition: Galatians 2:15-21 introduces us to the four basic principles that the rest of the book is going to thoroughly flesh out so that we can understand and live in the relationship with God that Jesus Christ has made for us!

The first principle Paul teaches us is that ...

(1) There is nothing a person can do to change their identity as a sinner separated from God. (2:15-16)

- A. **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.**
- B. **15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;**
1. To be a sinner is fundamentally to be one who lives in rebellion to God either consciously or ignorantly; it makes no difference why, but that you are. In verse 15 the context is ignorance. In stating Gentiles are sinners he is contrasting it with the reality that Jews are born into. Gentiles are born into the identity of being a person who lives in rebellion against God because they have no knowledge of God or what He expects. Jews however are born into a different situation. In his letter to the church in Rome Paul spoke of that privilege,
 2. **1 Then what advantage has the Jew? Or what is the value of circumcision? 2 Much in every way. To begin with, the Jews were entrusted with the oracles of God. (Romans 3:1-2)**
 3. The point he makes in Romans 3 is not that the Law, or the Prophets or even circumcision, made them just before God; but rather it demonstrated that God was pursuing them, revealing Himself to them, and seeking them. As such, they, above all the peoples of the earth, had every reason to live loving and following Him. They were not born into the ignorance of God like the gentiles were, but rather, they were born into the knowledge and very real reality of what God had done and was doing to reveal Himself to the world!
 4. However, having this incredible privilege of being the only people on earth God had chosen to call His own, and having the exact instructions from God on how and what He expected them to do, still changed nothing about their eternal relationship with God. It's why Paul wrote,
- C. **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.**
1. The problem is that we are born in a state of not being "justified," which means we don't have a right to get to know God. Man is by nature not worthy of a relationship with God. Mankind is by nature rebellious against God and as such he is incapable of being anything different. We are incapable of living in submission to God nor of living in true unity with Him. We cannot separate ourselves from our desire to rule ourselves as opposed to being ruled by God, nor can we separate ourselves from the selfishness

that keeps us from truly being one with God, not to mention, truly one with anybody else, including ourselves!

2. Interestingly every major world religion recognizes humanities natural condition to be a lack of oneness (love) with whoever they believe the creator(s) of the universe to be, but also with others and even ourselves. In each case, they recommend a system of rules, methods or traditions that make a just way to restore us to God, others and ourselves. Some religions even teach reincarnation, which gives you unlimited opportunities at getting things right, just don't mess up too bad, because if you do you will come back worse off in the next life than you were in this life; you could even come back as something not human – i.e. a cow.
3. The Bible NEVER participates in this effort. It never asserts that there is some system, or set of laws, or traditions, or meditations by which you and I can overcome our state of chaos and justly, or even unjustly enter into unity with God, others or ourselves! Galatians, and the rest of the Bible make the following very clear:
 - a. We are not justified to get to be one with God.
 - b. There is no such act that is worthy of earning a relationship with God, and even if there was, we are such sinners by nature that even if there was a thing we could do that could hypothetically deserve God, we would still have within us motives and actions that are not deserving of God, and as such, remain under the judgement of God!
 - c. Sinning is not simply something we do, its who we are. We are born sinners and thus born not only separated from God, others and ourselves; but born incapable of being anything different! Its why the Bible says,
 - d. **“5 Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.” (Psalm 51:5)**
 - e. **“20 Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)**
 - f. **“9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9)**
 - g. **“9 What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, 10 as it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one;" (Romans 3:9-10)**

4. Being a sinner, as in the reality of our identity that we can't change, is why Paul stated this principle THREE times in one verse!! Look at it again,
- D. 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.**
1. Now, as I stated in my introduction, Paul is going to explain this in more depth as we go on through the book, especially in chapters 3 and 4. But here he sums it with repetition that there is no work of any law that you or I can do that justifies us getting to be one with God, which is of itself eternal life (John 17:3).
 2. This is not a statement that if you could obey the Mosaic Law then you could be justified, but rather that there is literally NO WORK within the Mosaic Law, or any other law, that enables a person to be set free from the curse of sin that all mankind has been placed under.
 3. As such, Gentiles are born into an ignorant reality of being sinners, whereas Jews are born into an informed reality of being sinners, but nonetheless, both are sinners that are incapable of being anything other! Therefore, neither Jew nor Gentile is ever capable of being justified to be one with God and as such also incapable of being one with others or themselves.
- E. “Nothing is more plainly revealed in Scripture than this: that by the works of the law shall no man be justified. Yet men in some shape or other stick to the hope of legal righteousness. They will have it that they must prepare for grace, or assist mercy, or in some degree deserve eternal life. They prefer their own flattering prejudices to the declaration of the heart-searching God. (Charles Spurgeon)”¹**

The second principle Paul teaches us is that ...

(2) Faith in Christ is the means by which we receive the right to be one with God, but it is not what deserves it! (2:16-19)

- A. 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.**

¹ Spurgeon, C. (2013). *Galatians*. (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 2:15–16). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

- B. We are going to talk about what Jesus has done that has justified us being children of God in a second, but here I just want to point out that Paul is not saying faith justifies us, but rather its Jesus who justifies us.
- C. Faith is how we receive what has been provided! Faith is how we experience it, but faith is not what earns it. Faith therefore is not a work that earns, but a commitment to receive.
- D. Now, it's important that I clarify something here. James helps us understand that faith is not simply stating you believe something to be true. Some misinterpret James as saying works is what earns our right to know God and be in unity with Him, however, that's not at all what James is suggesting. James is making it clear that faith is not mere belief in facts, but rather a commitment to God because you believe the Gospel to be true. The works that flow from that commitment are not things that earn the relationship, but rather evidence that you have it! If there is no outward demonstration of faith, then it's not by definition faith. In the same way, if there is no outward demonstration of my love for my wife and children then what I have for them is not by definition love, but something else. James said,
 1. **"14 What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ... 19 You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe--and shudder!" (James 2:14, 19)**
 2. Likewise, Jesus said,
 3. **"15 "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15)**

Note: It's not a process of earning a relationship with Him but a reality that if you love Him you are going to try and do what He told us to do. It's the reality of what love and faith is and isn't. It's a description of what faith does and not what faith earns.
 4. Faith is taking God at His Word, and as such committing to follow Him. The act of obeying and following doesn't earn or regulate our standing with Him, in fact we generally aren't really good at it, but it does testify if its real.
- E. This is also why Paul wrote the next couple of verses in our passage. He did not want faith confused as a more romanticized or sanitized word for religious works.

The third principle Paul teaches us is that ...

(3) Christ's death ends our identity as sinners--religious or otherwise! (2:17-20a)

- A. 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.**
- B.** Verse 17 and 18 show that if I live as a sinner with no commitment or effort to follow Jesus, then my identity is still as a sinner; that is, who I am is still a person who doesn't care about loving, knowing or obeying God, and as such, I clearly have not received the grace of having that relationship! I PROVE myself to BE a transgressor and not a child of God.
- C.** HOWEVER, verse 18 and 19 show that it is also true that if I return to the idea of trusting in my ability to obey the Law of Moses, or any other religious system as the means of separating myself to know and follow God, then I have proven myself still to be a sinner unwilling to trust in the work of Christ; a person still void of the relationship with God provided by Christ!
- D.** Interestingly verse 19 links back to what he just confronted Peter and Barnabas about, that is, the fact that they had removed themselves from table fellowship with Gentile believers, to be affirmed by their Jewish brothers who refused to accept Gentile believers as brothers. The law alienated those who were not Jewish and made them second class citizens. But if our justification to be His children, that is, to be one with God and with one another is Christ, then the separation created by The Law no longer matters. Therefore, rebuilding that separation, as Paul called out Peter for doing earlier in chapter two, shows a person to be a transgressor rather than a Child of God! They are literally working against Christ. They are literally working against what He has already done!
- E.** In addition, Paul is saying here that The Law, that intentionally separated them from the Gentiles and expected them to act as such, is also the law that created an opportunity to no longer be under it or held accountable to it so that he could finally live in unity with God, others and himself. The Law was incapable of bringing unity because its purpose was separation, but it did prepare the way for the one who brought unity! The Law is what God used to establish the nation of Israel and bring forth Christ, and as such, the purpose of the law was fulfilled. When Christ died, the covenant God made with Israel to bring about that death died with it!
- F.** This is why Paul wrote in verse 20 that when Christ died, he DIED with HIM! First, Paul walks back to what he said in verse 15 to make sure it's well understood that there is no work, including anything in the Mosaic Law, that if a person does it, justifies them receiving the gift of being one with God; of belonging to Him; of having His life! There is no work that we can do to make such an incredible purchase and even if there was such a work, we are incapable

of actually doing it! Therefore, when Paul said I DIED WITH CHRIST he is saying, the Jewish sinner named Saul, the person who by his very nature was incapable of knowing God, nor earning the right to know God; the person who was an expert at obeying the Law that could do nothing to change his relational status with God, nor bring unity between him and others or himself; that person DIED with Christ!

This takes us straight to the fourth principle Paul teaches us

(4) The foundation and practice of a relationship with God is Christ. (2:20-21)

- A. John Bunyan wrote, **“Do this and live, the law commands, but gives me neither feet nor hands. A better word the gospel brings. It bids me fly and gives me wings.” (John Bunyan)**²
- B. **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.**
- C. The reason why we are incapable of entering into a relationship with God is that we would first have to pay the price of all that we are and all that we have done that is unworthy of God, and as such, under His judgment! The judgment of God on us being sinners is an eternal separation from Him. We must first suffer this eternally incompletable task to even have the opportunity to do anything worthy of a relationship with Him! We are therefore left in this state of being sinners who are still suffering from it, ever since Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden (eternal life with God). But Christ came and accomplished both acts! He paid our debt and earned our right! His perfect love and obedience to the Father is what we are incapable of doing, that is, His love and obedience to the Father is worthy of the Father while ours in anything but! Furthermore, in His death on the cross He also did what we could not do. He suffered the full wrath of God on our sin. Christ took the responsibility of our sin and as such took the judgement of experiencing eternal death, but because He is God, He was able to in every way fully suffer the eternal consequence in a mere moment. Christ’s resurrection then proved God’s judgement was completed!
- D. Therefore, in doing this for us, when Christ died eternal death, we died eternal death! In addition, when Christ rose from the grave, we rose from the grave as well! Therefore, Paul says the life I now live, meaning in this life (the flesh) is not one trusting in my works, or the law, or any other form of religion, but rather totally in what Christ has accomplished in His death and resurrection for me!

² Wuest, K. S. (1997). [*Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader*](#) (Vol. 3, pp. 80–81). Grand Rapids: Eerdmans.

His death pays the penalty, and His life earns the favor! I'm just as alive as Christ is alive!

- E.** Both the foundation and the "practice" has been changed. The foundation is not success in religion but the success of Christ's work on the cross. The foundation is the relationship Christ has brought to me, not in my ability to do something that justifies me coming to Him. The foundation is Christ being in me, not me being in Christ!
- F.** Additionally, the practice is no longer a system of rules, customs and traditions that create and enhance the strength of a relationship, but rather that which naturally and organically flows out of believing I am loved (faith); and the confidence that I have the right to this relationship, not by what I have done, but rather by that which was done for me – in this relationship created by CHRIST Himself!
- G.** The practice of this relationship is one of believing you are loved therefore you love in return, knowing its accepted before its even given. In religion you always wonder if it's enough. In a relationship with God you know it's enough because Christ is enough, and therefore you are motivated to give more, not out of guilt, fear, or law, but out of joy and love! Relationships grow because each person is committed to the other, which is fundamentally different than how religion works!
- H.** Additionally, in religion the work is the focus, whereas in a relationship the person is the focus. In religion the work is holy, in a relationship the relationship is holy. One says, "I do therefore I matter" while the other says "I matter therefore I do." In a religion the rules, customs and traditions are the point; in a relationship rules, customs and traditions may exist, but they are not the point nor even the means of the relationship, the person is. For example,
 - 1.** We have rules in our marriage, but they are not the focus.
 - a.** For instance, we have a rule that we will not have any kind of relationship that resembles any kind of dating type relationship with another person. However, I'm not living my life trying to not end up dating a woman. I'm living my life to love and know my wife! The rule is not my focus, the relationship is, and as such, the rule is something I obey by default. In addition, because Keri and our marriage matters, the rule that honors her and our marriage matters.
 - b.** Similarly, as believers, we live in a relationship with the Father. He is the authority and as such He has rules. Those rules are NOT spelled out by the Mosaic Law. At times there are similarities, but you do not discover how God wants you to act in this New Covenant relationship created by Christ by reading and studying the Old Testament, but rather

by reading the New Testament. The Old Testament will certainly enrich your faith, but it is not the testimony of the New Covenant, but of the Old Covenant that took us to the New Covenant. It points us to the New, but it is not the New. Therefore, to learn how and what we are to do in the relationship with God given to us through Christ we need to read, understand and be transformed by the Gospel that is brought to light in the New Testament, then when you go back and read the Old Testament (Covenant) what was still a shrouded mystery to those authors will leap off the pages to you! However, to say that we are not ruled by God in the New Covenant, and as such, we are in an equal relationship with God where we define morality, ethics, His will, etc., is as absurd as suggesting that the Law given to Moses is still how He intends to rule us. MUCH more on that as we go through Galatians.

2. We have customs in our marriage, but they are not the focus nor our allegiance.
 - a. For instance, I normally work 60 hours between Sunday AM and Thursday PM, therefore, with all three kids having things going on in addition to that, Keri and I don't get a lot of time to talk to each other on those five days. So, a while back, we formed a custom for Friday. I get up and help Keri get the kids all set and dropped off at school. Then once they are all gone Keri and I read through my sermon notes and talk about anything that needs to be tweaked. There are usually grammatical errors to fix; we discuss the doctrine and/or application in it, as well as talk through things that may not be stated in the best or right way. We then head to the gym where she does a workout class and I do a weight circuit, hit the grocery store if we need to, then home to eat lunch together. After that I start on the "honey do" list and the day goes from there. Point is, Friday AM has become a custom for us.
 - b. In a relationship, the point of a custom is not the custom, but rather the person you do the custom with! However, in religion the point would be getting the custom right, in a relationship the custom exists because the relationship does; the relationship is the point, and as such the custom might change! The custom is not the focus the person is. For instance, if Keri wakes up sick its totally ok that we don't go to the gym because the point is not the gym ... its one another! However, in religion we would be headed to the gym!!
- I. So back to the text, let's read those last two verses together in their entirety.
- J. **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.

- K. Paul practiced religious customs with Jews but then he didn't practice them with gentiles, why, because the point wasn't the custom! So Paul in no way is saying if you have any customs and traditions then you nullify the purpose of the cross, however, what He is saying is that if you believe The Mosaic Law, or any other custom, rules, or instructions can serve as a means of receiving or maturing you in the grace of God, then Christ's horrific death had no purpose!
- L. Spurgeon put this stark statement of Paul in Galatians 2:21 this way,
- M. **"We cannot be saved by our own merits, for if so, the atonement was unnecessary—a blasphemous idea not to be tolerated for a moment. If a man can be saved by his own works and willings and doings, then Christ's death was an unnecessary piece of torture. Instead of being the most glorious manifestation of divine love, it was a shameful waste, putting upon Christ a terrible burden of suffering that was totally unnecessary."**³
- N. But Paul's point was that Christ is the foundation of our relationship with God and as such faith in Christ is the practice of a relationship with God; it is the only means of receiving and experiencing God's Grace!
- O. We are going to obviously be digging into the principle way more as we go through the rest of Galatians, so let me take you to an application.

Challenge: What are the areas of your life that you can't accept God's grace; where you nullify it for yourself?

In past sermons I have talked about the arrogance of refusing to accept God's grace, and that is certainly insinuated in Galatians in many places, but today we want to focus on something different.

So many people disconnect from Christ and the local church because they feel ashamed of their sin. That's total religious, legalistic, Law, kind of thinking that causes you to say to yourself that you don't deserve to be here because you sinned! I've seen it time and time again, especially with adultery. There's a sexual failure in a marriage. The one who committed adultery feels ashamed to show back up in church because they are ashamed of what they did. Similarly, the spouse that the adultery was committed against doesn't want to come back because they feel ashamed that their spouse did it.

But Christ's death and resurrection should remove all of that, that is, if we believe the Gospel, and are a part of a local church like this one that believes it!

³ Spurgeon, C. (2013). *Galatians*. (E. Ritzema, Ed.) (Ga 2:21). Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

Now listen, we should feel some shame about our sin. Its sin! Its rebellion against a loving God who sent His Son to die for us; its choosing death when life has been given to us at such a high price! HOWEVER, the knowledge of the Gospel then removes that shame because it assures us that Christ died because we are sinners so that He could save us from sin, not condemn us to be stuck in it because we proved we needed Him!

So, when we get convicted by the Holy Spirit about our sin, shame is a natural and honestly right feeling for the moment, but only as long it takes to quickly turn back to The One standing there with open arms waiting for us to walk with HIM!

You probably know this story, but I can't help by closing with it,

2 Early in the morning he came again to the temple. All the people came to him, and he sat down and taught them. 3 The scribes and the Pharisees brought a woman who had been caught in adultery, and placing her in the midst 4 they said to him, "Teacher, this woman has been caught in the act of adultery. 5 Now in the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. So what do you say?" 6 This they said to test him, that they might have some charge to bring against him. Jesus bent down and wrote with his finger on the ground. 7 And as they continued to ask him, he stood up and said to them, "Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her." 8 And once more he bent down and wrote on the ground. 9 But when they heard it, they went away one by one, beginning with the older ones, and Jesus was left alone with the woman standing before him. 10 Jesus stood up and said to her, "Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?" 11 She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "Neither do I condemn you; go, and from now on sin no more." (John 8:2-11)

When Jesus said go and sin no more, He was telling her I love you, and that tells you all need to know about yourself. You are not the sin you committed; you are mine, so without shame go forward and don't look back! If she didn't believe the love and forgiveness He was telling her about, then she would have laid there or walked away and went right back to living as a sinner, however, if she believed His love and forgiveness truly washed away the shame of her sin, then she had no reason to go back to the shame of the adultery, but rather every reason to walk in the gladness of a relationship with God! She had every reason to turn from living in adultery and turn to righteousness and God's love!