



Scotts Hill Baptist Church

LIVING IN FREEDOM • DOCTRINE OF DOCTRINES • GALATIANS 2:15-21 •

MAIN POINT

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

Why do people want to "score points" with God? What's tempting about this approach? What's wrong with this approach?

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 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?

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?

PRAYER

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

Galatians 2:15-21

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.