

GALATIANS 2

Matthew Ranck

STAND ALONE / Gospel; Justification / Galatians 2

TEXT

Galatians 2 **ESV**

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars,

perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

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.

MAIN IDEA

“Only through faith in Christ are we accepted before God and alive to Him.” (Exalting Jesus in *Galatians*)

OUTLINE

1. FREED BY GRACE
2. THREE PICTURES (2:1-21)
 - a. LEGALISM: RIGHT BEHAVIOR WITH WRONG BELIEF (2:1-10)
 - b. HYPOCRISY: RIGHT BELIEF WITH WRONG BEHAVIOR (2:11-14)
 - c. FAITH: RIGHT BELIEF WITH RIGHT BEHAVIOR (2:15-21)
3. FAITH ALONE
 - a. THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, WE ARE ACCEPTED BEFORE GOD
 - b. THROUGH FAITH IN CHRIST, WE ARE ALIVE TO GOD
4. FREED THROUGH FAITH

1. FREED BY GRACE

The main truth we get from reading the first chapter of

Paul's letter to the churches in Galatia is that God's covenant love for his people is not based on any performance that created man could offer to Him. And in one sense, that should be the most *freeing* promise that there is, and indeed it is. But that also likely stokes some flames of frustration when it comes to this life.

Although we cannot earn the favor of God, Scripture certainly speaks to the idea of pleasing God, and what that consists of.

2 Corinthians 5:9 ESV

⁹ So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

1 Thessalonians 2:4 ESV

⁴ but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the gospel, so we speak, not to please man, but to please God who tests our hearts.

1 Thessalonians 4:1 ESV

¹ Finally, then, brothers, we ask and urge you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God, just as you are doing, that you do so more and more.

So the thought and question that comes out of this is: If God's pleasure in and love for me is not based on anything I can do, that he doesn't grade or judge or pay on a performance scale, then how can I please him? In Galatians 2 there are three different pictures that help us answer the question — two episodes in Paul's life and then one big explanation of what it looks like to please God.

2. Three Pictures

a. Legalism (2:1-10)

Galatians 2:1-10 *ESV*

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we

should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

In these verses we see **right behavior with wrong belief**. People debate the timing of this event, but most scholars either argue that this is right in line with the events of either Acts 11 or Acts 15. I tend to lean that this is prior to the meeting of the Jerusalem Council.

“There are similarities between what Galatians 2 describes and what happens in Acts 15, but there are also significant differences. Also, if Paul were writing this letter after the Jerusalem Council, then certainly he would have mentioned the decision of the church leaders in Jerusalem, a decision that decisively denounced the Judaizers.” (Platt & Merida, 40)

The issue at hand here between Paul and some “false brothers” (2:4) is whether or not Titus, a Gentile believer, needed to be circumcised. Essentially the Judaizers, are saying: ‘to be saved, you needed to follow the Jewish law, most notably, the requirement of circumcision.’ So if Titus would have caved and got circumcised, then the Judaizers would have their way in this debate, and would deal a big blow to the biblical gospel of grace, because it would support adding human requirements as necessary for salvation. Of course, we see that Titus was not compelled to be circumcised, and it led to the apostles in Jerusalem affirming Paul as an apostle and supporting the teaching and preaching he was offering of justification by grace

alone.

Another definition we could give for legalism is: “working in our own power according to our own rules, ultimately to earn God’s favor.” (Platt & Merida, 40) The Judaizers were, at the surface level, chasing after “good” things, which is why we can say that they had the right behavior, but had the wrong belief. Circumcision was essential to the Jewish tradition, dating all the way back to the days of Abraham. As well as a host of other Jewish laws that were offered in the Mosaic Covenant. And none of those were inherently bad in and of themselves. But what happens is when you take laws and use obedience to them as the standard by which you are justified before God, that is when legalism is present.

Today, our problem isn’t exactly circumcision or Jewish laws, but there’s a plethora of things that we might bring to the table as benchmarks or standards by which we tend to assess favor before God. Can we name a few?

Some of these are good or neutral things, but when we do them thinking that we are gaining or earning something by doing or not doing something, then we are becoming legalistic. And the reality is that we all have a tendency to be legalistic. Because of the fall, we all have a sinful nature and tend to think that we can earn a right standing with God.

› **Testimony of conversation with Grandfather at Christmas**
B. Hypocrisy (2:11-14)

Hypocrisy is nothing better than skindeep holiness.

John Blanchard

Galatians 2:11-14 ESV

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

The picture that we get here in these verses is the reverse of what we just saw. Instead of right behavior with wrong belief, we see ***right belief with wrong behavior***. And I want you to gather the weight of this scene right here. This is like an early church heavyweight fight. Paul the Apostle publicly confronts Peter the Apostle. Let's get the full picture here.

The church at Antioch was a church plant, that we see come to fruition in Acts 11. It is a church that we know is mostly comprised of gentiles. When Peter came to this church, he begins to assimilate. What does that word mean? Now that might seem of little importance, but that is big for a 1st century Jew. Under the old covenant, God had so many laws issued to the Jewish people that was

designed to create a distinctive people on earth, as God's vessel for redemption. This would prevent the covenant nation of Israel from being corrupted by pagan nations and losing their distinctiveness (picture of 'salt of the earth'). So when Peter eats with the gentiles, this is a pivotal moment. Gentiles ate shrimp and rabbit and bacon. Jews were not so supposed to eat any of that.

But Peter has something happen to him in Acts 10.

Acts 10:9-36 ESV

⁹ The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. ¹⁰ And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance ¹¹ and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. ¹² In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. ¹³ And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." ¹⁴ But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." ¹⁵ And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common." ¹⁶ This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven.

¹⁷ Now while Peter was inwardly perplexed as to what the vision that he had seen might mean, behold, the men who were sent by Cornelius, having made inquiry for Simon's house, stood at the gate ¹⁸ and called out to ask whether

Simon who was called Peter was lodging there. ¹⁹ And while Peter was pondering the vision, the Spirit said to him, “Behold, three men are looking for you. ²⁰ Rise and go down and accompany them without hesitation, for I have sent them.” ²¹ And Peter went down to the men and said, “I am the one you are looking for. What is the reason for your coming?” ²² And they said, “Cornelius, a centurion, an upright and God-fearing man, who is well spoken of by the whole Jewish nation, was directed by a holy angel to send for you to come to his house and to hear what you have to say.” ²³ So he invited them in to be his guests.

The next day he rose and went away with them, and some of the brothers from Joppa accompanied him. ²⁴ And on the following day they entered Caesarea. Cornelius was expecting them and had called together his relatives and close friends. ²⁵ When Peter entered, Cornelius met him and fell down at his feet and worshiped him. ²⁶ But Peter lifted him up, saying, “Stand up; I too am a man.” ²⁷ And as he talked with him, he went in and found many persons gathered. ²⁸ And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean. ²⁹ So when I was sent for, I came without objection. I ask then why you sent for me.”

³⁰ And Cornelius said, “Four days ago, about this hour, I

was praying in my house at the ninth hour, and behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing ³¹ and said, ‘Cornelius, your prayer has been heard and your alms have been remembered before God. ³² Send therefore to Joppa and ask for Simon who is called Peter. He is lodging in the house of Simon, a tanner, by the sea.’ ³³ So I sent for you at once, and you have been kind enough to come. Now therefore we are all here in the presence of God to hear all that you have been commanded by the Lord.”

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, ³⁵ but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him. ³⁶ As for the word that he sent to Israel, preaching good news of peace through Jesus Christ (he is Lord of all), Peter then preaches the gospel to Cornelius and his household, and Acts 10:44-48 explains the result:

Acts 10:44-48 ESV

⁴⁴ While Peter was still saying these things, the Holy Spirit fell on all who heard the word. ⁴⁵ And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles. ⁴⁶ For they were hearing them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter declared, ⁴⁷ “Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?” ⁴⁸ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for

some days.

The Holy Spirit is poured out on the Gentiles. Like a second Pentecost. The promise of Acts 1:8 is being fulfilled. And some Jews are not happy about it.

Acts 11:1-3 ESV

¹ Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God. ² So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ³ “You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.”

But Peter then explains that a second Pentecost had happened, and their reaction changes:

Acts 11:18 ESV

¹⁸ When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, “Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.”

So in Galatians 2:12 says that Peter used to eat with the Gentiles, but because he was nervous of being mocked and ridiculed by these Jews, he stopped eating with them, and starting separating himself from them. And this is was the same apostle who brought the gospel to the gentiles in Acts 10. And this is happening after that. And other people are following this example, including Barnabas. What is the implication? Peter’s hypocrisy seemed to say that the gentiles may not be fully acceptable before God.

Key Phrase: Galatians 2:14

Galatians 2:14 ESV

¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with

the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

This was right belief with wrong behavior, hypocrisy. Peter knew the gospel, and believed the gospel, but his actions didn't reflect the gospel, so Paul calls him out.

Today we are not dealing with issues of whether or not Jews and Gentiles should eat together or what kind of food we're eating, but we've got plenty of hypocritical examples in our day. Can you name a few?

It's not legalistic for believers to confront sin and hypocrisy (no matter how big or small), even if it's someone of great esteem.

What Galatians does is remind us of how easy we tend to find ourselves in one of these lanes, either legalism or hypocrisy. One lane we tend to drive in is thinking that doing good things or avoiding certain things will earn us favor with God (legalism). Or tend to swerve in the lane of claiming to have the gospel of grace but live like the world in some respect (hypocrisy). We need to avoid both of these, which is the beauty of beginning again, coming back to the basics of the gospel. And only God's Word and Holy Spirit can keep us from these.

One of the other issues that Paul addresses in this passage is a two-tiered Christianity that could have come about by this scenario. Jews on one side and Gentiles on the other. We have to guard against a divisive mind-set in the Kingdom, because there are no second-tier Christians in

the Kingdom. What examples of tiered Christianity can you think of today?

“Now this doesn’t mean we don’t encourage one another to follow Christ and to obey the mission of Christ.” (Platt & Merida, 44)

C. Faith (2:15-21)

Galatians 2:15–21 ESV

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.

This is the third picture in this passage that demonstrates what it means to please God. Here we get ***right belief with right behavior***. How do these two come together? The key word is *faith*. It all revolves around faith, with no

additions. Justification is by faith alone.

Justification by faith is the hinge on which all true religion turns.

John Calvin

And these verses give us two major fruits or results of faith.

1. Through Faith in Christ, We Are Accepted before God

V.15-16, Paul reminds Peter that they, as Jews, did not find salvation through the law, but through faith in Christ. If right standing with God comes from the law, or anything that we could do, then Jesus died for nothing (2:21). To go back and live as if the law saves after you've been saved through faith in Christ is, in Paul's words, "to rebuild the system I tore down" (2:18). Paul reminds Peter, that there is a new and better Covenant, than the old. In which favor before God doesn't depend on circumcision or what you eat, but whether your faith and trust is in Jesus Christ and what he has done. In other words, your standing before God is not based on your works, but Jesus's work. And this New Covenant surpasses the old not just in arrangement (executor), but in the scope. The Mosaic Covenant was intended only for the nation of Israel, the New Covenant is for the nations! (Jews & Gentiles)

Along with faith, the other key term here is *justified*. Also means "righteousness" (legal term)

Luther on Justification:

"And this is the truth of the Gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein knowledge of all godliness consists. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we

should know this [subject] well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually.” (Luther, *Commentary*, 206)

That is what Paul is doing all throughout this book. He is driving home the point that justification is indispensable in terms of how we think of the gospel and the Christian life.

Justification: Justification is the gracious act of God by which God declares a sinner righteous solely through faith in Jesus Christ.

At the end of V.16 Paul alludes to Psalm 143:1-2

Psalm 143:1-2 ESV

¹ Hear my prayer, O LORD;

give ear to my pleas for mercy!

In your faithfulness answer me, in your righteousness!

² Enter not into judgment with your servant,

for no one living is righteous before you.

The psalmist is at the end of himself, because he knows that nobody is righteous before God, nor is there anything that you can do to make him right before God. Nothing in us warrants, merits, initiates, or causes God to save us.

Justification is all about grace, which means that faith itself is evidence of grace, not the bringer of grace. Faith isn't a work. This is what Paul is getting at. "Do this (or don't do this) and you will be saved." This goes for the same things we see in the church today. Pray a prayer, walk

an aisle, sign a card, take a class, etc. and you will be saved. Faith is not a work you can create your justification out of, is an act of sheer grace by God.

Justification is the gracious act by which God declares. This justification is a declaration. The word picture is that of a judge declaring his verdict, his judgment. This is important, because justification is a singular act not a process. It's a once-for-all declaration. Once it happens, it's done!

Romans 5:1 ESV

¹ Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:29–30 ESV

²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.

When Paul encountered Christ, he realized that God's judgment was due him, not simply for his wickedness, but even for his goodness. If that sounds strange, consider Paul's pre-conversion spiritual resume:

Philippians 3:5–6 ESV

⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.

Paul has spent his entire life seeking to obey the law of God, trying to be good. Yes, he was persecuting the church, but that's because he perceived the church to be opposed to the old covenant. But when Christ comes to him, he realizes he's not good.

Philippians 3:8 ESV

⁸ Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
All of our self-generated “goodness” is actually filthy in the sight of God.

In justification, God takes the sinner, a guilty sinner, and makes him righteous. The holy judge of the universe takes a sinner who is in willing rebellion, deserving of only a guilty verdict, and says, “not guilty.” But how?

Justification is solely through faith in Jesus Christ. God the judge takes the righteousness of Christ and credits it to you, when you repent and turn from your sin, and express faith and trust in the work and person of Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:21 ESV

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

Historic Creeds and Confessions (Question 60)

How are thou righteous before God? Only by a true faith in Jesus Christ; so that, though my conscience accuse me, that I have grossly transgressed all the commandments of God, and kept none of them, and am still inclined to all

evil; notwithstanding, God, without any merit of mine, but only of mere grace, grants and imputes to me, the perfect satisfaction, righteousness and holiness of Christ; even so, as if I never had had, nor committed any sin: yea, as if I had fully accomplished all that obedience which Christ has accomplished for me; inasmuch as I embrace such benefit with a believing heart.

Rolls-Royce Illustration

2. *Through Faith in Christ, We Are Alive To God*

V.18,19: Paul warns against trusting in Christ and then returning to live like your acceptance before God is based on following the law.

Galatians 2:19 ESV

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

Not only are we justified by faith, but **we live by faith.**

Paul had no room for a salvation that consists of praying a prayer, supposedly trusting in Jesus, and then living your life the same after that. Impossible. Faith isn't just *receiving* salvation; it's also for enabling us to *live out* salvation. We live every day, every moment, by faith.

Galatians 2:20 ESV

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.

Despite what we might normally hear, we are not in debt to Jesus. We typically reflect on what He did in the past on

the cross, which is obviously important, but if we're not careful, we will leave it there and start to think: *Jesus has done this for me, so what can I now do for him?* We need to not think like that, because Jesus has not stopped *doing* for you!

“The Christian life is not so much about you and I living for Christ as it is trusting Christ to live for us and through us and in us.” (Platt & Merida, 50)

This is faith in Christ, not just the Christ who died on the cross, but the Christ who indwells and lives in believers. We live by faith when we believe Christ every moment of every day. We believe Him to be our sustenance and our strength. We believe Him to be our love and joy and peace. We believe Him to be our satisfaction.

This is being a Christian: believing Christ to be everything you need for every moment you live. You live by faith in the Son of God.

4. FREED THROUGH FAITH

So how do you please God? How can you obey all these radical commands of Christ that we see in the Gospels, and the New Testament? Even the command of repent and believe? The answer is you can't. You need the Trinitarian God. You need Christ, and he's available to you, so repent and trust him. Realize that God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for Him; instead, **God's pleasure in you is based on Christ's performance for you.**

- He is passionate about you!
- There is a price to be paid, will you pay it or will you trust Jesus who has paid it already, and have him stand in your place?