

## Works and Faith

Devotional Reading: [Galatians 2:1–10](#)

Background Scripture: [Galatians 2:11–21](#)

### [Galatians 2:11–21](#)

<sup>11</sup> When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

<sup>14</sup> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

<sup>15</sup> “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles <sup>16</sup> know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup> “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup> If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

<sup>19</sup> “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

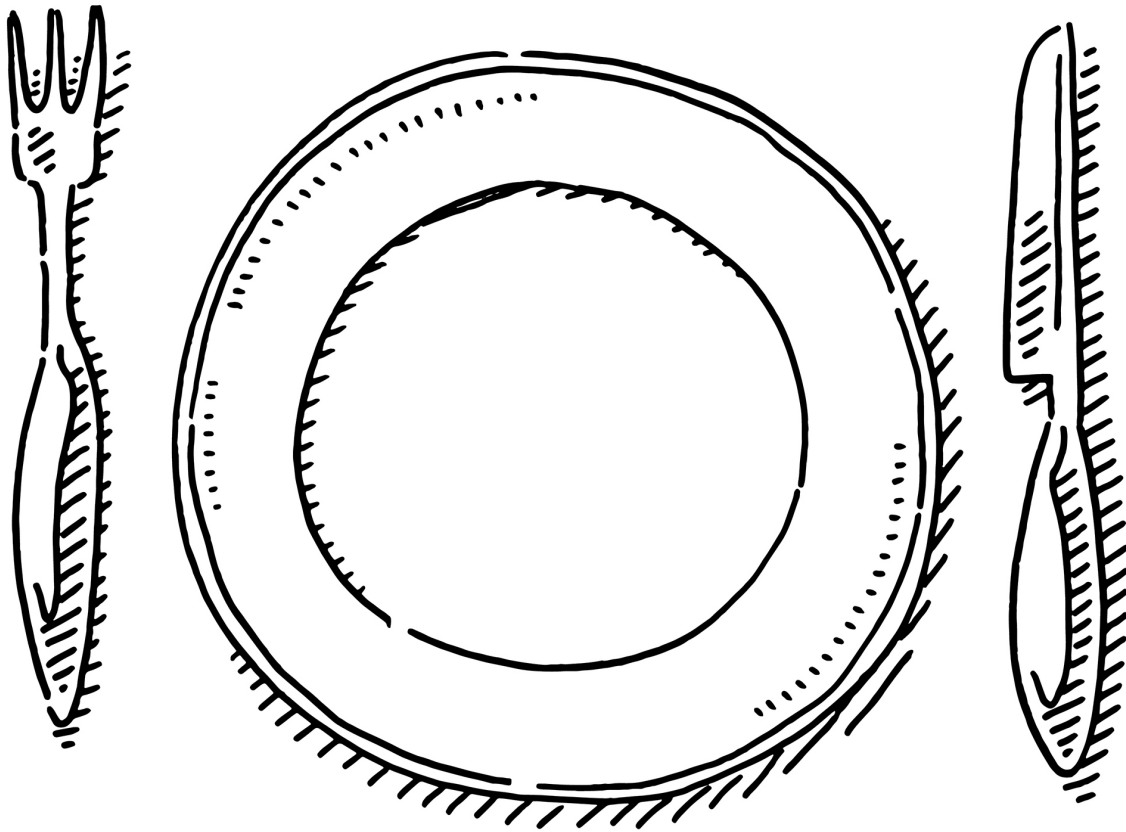


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## Key Text

*The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.—Galatians 2:20b*

God's Law Is Love

## Unit 2: Faith Triumphs, Law Fails

Lessons 5–9

### Lesson Aims

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify how a person *is* and *is not* justified.

2. Summarize Peter's error.
3. Identify a parallel error today and commit to avoiding it.

## Lesson Outline

### Introduction

- A. More Than Doctrine
- B. Lesson Context

#### I. Dissonance (Galatians 2:11–14)

- A. Acting in Fear (vv. 11–12)
- B. Leading Others Astray (vv. 13–14)  
*Carried Away*

#### II. Gospel (Galatians 2:15–21)

- A. Justified by Faith (vv. 15–16)
- B. Accepting God's Grace (vv. 17–21)  
*Already Dead*

### Conclusion

- A. Life in Christ
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

## How to Say It

- Derbe *Der-be.*  
Galatia *Guh-lay-shuh.*  
Iconium *Eye-ko-nee-um.*  
Judaizers *Joo-duh-ize-ers.*  
Lystra *Liss-truh.*  
Pisidian *Pih-sid-ee-un.*

## Introduction

### A. More Than Doctrine

Like many 18-year-olds, I thought I knew everything. I was a first-year Bible college student with a group of young, zealous, and like-minded guys who were dedicated to our doctrines, and anyone who disagreed with us was simply wrong. With a sense of superiority, we would often debate others in the dorms about their understandings of the particulars of Christian doctrines. Our statements and actions belittled anyone who came from a different Christian tradition. They were not like us, so we marginalized them.

At lunch one day, a friend of mine was nettling one of our opponents. A professor of ours stepped in. With firmness and truth, our professor told my friend that he was not representing Christ. I stood there in fear and humility, knowing that I too was receiving this correction. Our arguments over doctrines did not further the gospel in this case; they served as a dividing line between us and them. Our lesson today cuts to heart of a similar issue faced by Peter and Paul.

## B. Lesson Context

Unlike many of his letters, Paul did not address the book of Galatians to the church in a particular city. Galatia was a Roman province in the central highlands area of modern Turkey. Paul and Barnabas had evangelized this area on the first missionary journey, including the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe ([Acts 13–14](#)). These cities were the recipients of the book, which was intended to be circulated among them and read to all the churches ([Galatians 1:2](#)).

Galatians very likely was written several years after the Jerusalem Council of [Acts 15](#), which took place around AD 51. Many scholars believe that [Galatians 2:1–10](#) is Paul’s account of what happened when he attended that council. In this passage, Paul was careful to say that he did not need permission from anyone in Jerusalem to preach to the Gentiles, but he still welcomed their sanction and tacit agreement not to oppose his message. He noted that those church leaders had nothing to add to his message ([2:6](#)) and that God had ordained Paul to preach to Gentiles as Peter was chosen to preach to Jews ([2:7](#)).

Not everyone was on board with this arrangement. Some Judaizers had infiltrated the churches founded by Paul. They taught the members that they were required to follow the Jewish law ([Galatians 2:4](#)). Despite the decision of the Jerusalem Council, this Judaizing had continued. The churches were confused. Was the Law of Moses still in effect? Paul’s exposition of this matter is the heart of the book of Galatians.

## I. Dissonance ([Galatians 2:11–14](#))

### A. Acting in Fear (vv. 11–12)

#### **11. When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.**

*Antioch* was the capital city of Syria in Paul’s day. (This should not be confused with Pisidian Antioch, a smaller city in south central Asia Minor; see [Acts 13:14](#).) After the stoning of Stephen and the following persecution, some believers settled in Antioch, resulting in the gospel being preached to both Jews and Gentiles. These believers were the first to be called “Christians” ([11:19–26](#)). This group of believers sent Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey; Paul traveled back to Antioch to report how God had worked through their ministry ([13:1–3](#); [14:26–28](#)).

We don’t know why *Cephas* (Peter) made the journey of about 330 miles from Jerusalem to Antioch. He likely had some intention of meeting with the believers there. Why Paul *opposed him* and what Peter *stood condemned* for are clarified in the following verses.

### What Do You Think?

How do you decide whether to confront someone directly about his or her behavior?

### Digging Deeper

In what situations might a less direct approach be more beneficial to the misbehaving person?

**12. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.**

No command exists in the Old Testament that Israelites (later called Jews, a shortened form of “Judeans”) could not eat with Gentiles. The commands concerned unclean foods, not unclean people, as seen when God’s people rejected these foods without mention of their table fellows (examples: [Ezekiel 4:13–14](#); [Daniel 1:9–14](#); compare and contrast [Genesis 43:32](#)). But a weighty tradition of sharing meals only with other Jews grew out of a desire to keep the law and avoid adopting the abhorrent practices of other nations ([Leviticus 18:25–28](#); [20:23–24](#); [Deuteronomy 8:20](#); etc.; see [Acts 10:28](#)). This was meant to ensure fidelity to God by avoiding idolatrous contamination from outsiders. But from the Gentile perspective, this practice probably betrayed an unacceptable elitism. Maintaining division between Jews and Gentiles called into question equal access to salvation of the two groups ([Galatians 3:26–29](#)).

The *certain men* who came from James apparently were associated with a Judaizing faction within the budding Christian faith. Though the issue of *circumcision* officially was resolved at the Jerusalem Council ([Acts 15](#); see [lesson 10](#)), the Judaizing party was still active. James’s association with these men contradicts his prior judgment to “not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God,” especially concerning certain ritual laws ([15:19–20](#)).

The movement from Peter’s eating with *the Gentiles* to withdrawing and separating from them represented a retreat from the fullness of the gospel for both Jews and Gentiles, contradicting his own testimony before the council. His actions were blatant hypocrisy. Exactly why Peter feared this delegation is not stated. But his failure to live up to his earlier commitments reveals a double-mindedness regarding Gentiles, or at least a weakness of follow-through on what he believed to be true. We can contrast Peter’s actions here with his own report of his ministry concerning the household of Cornelius, a Gentile. There, too, the criticism regarded eating with Gentiles ([Acts 11:2–3](#)). But at that time, Peter rightly defended his fellowship with Gentiles as being the will of God ([11:17](#)).

## B. Leading Others Astray (vv. 13–14)

**13. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.**

Paul’s language is particularly harsh! The pervasiveness of the hypocrisy is shown when Paul mentions that even *Barnabas* had become involved. This “son of encouragement” ([Acts 4:36](#); compare [11:22–24](#)) found the peer pressure to avoid the Gentile believers too much to withstand. With his

moment of weakness, we are left to think that Paul stood as the sole Jew willing to have complete fellowship with these Gentile Christians!

### What Do You Think?

In what situations do you feel intimidated? How do you change the way you speak and act at those times?

### Digging Deeper

When you feel pressure to change for others, what helps you take an authentic approach that is consistent with your values?

## Carried Away

The guest speaker was famous, at least in my Christian circles. He'd written popular books, and he taught law at a large university. I sat up straight as he walked to the microphone during my college's morning chapel. He started with a joke. A dirty joke. Not so offensive that administrators would immediately boot him off the stage, but inappropriate. Several thousand students paused, then laughter began to roll around the auditorium. I didn't like the joke, but I smiled awkwardly to try to fit in.

"That's exactly the same response I get at secular universities," the speaker announced. He scolded us for not being different from the world. I didn't like his method, but I *still* remember the lesson. When everyone around me acted a certain way, including a respected leader, I found myself carried away with the crowd, much like Barnabas and Peter. Are you also blending in with people around you, even when you know better? What can you do differently?

—N. G.

**14. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"**

Paul's confrontation with Peter was not a small issue of favoritism and social practice. This matter cuts to *the truth of the gospel* of Jesus Christ. To be Christlike is to treat others the way Christ treats us. God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to the offer of salvation (see [Acts 10:34–35](#); [15:9](#); [Romans 2:11](#)). If God makes no distinction, neither should we. Therefore, Paul could write a little later, "There is neither Jew nor Greek, ... for you are all one in Christ Jesus" ([Galatians 3:28](#); see [lesson 9](#)).

It is easy to imagine that this was an intense, public confrontation (*in front of them all*). The Judaizers essentially said to Gentiles, "You don't have to be circumcised, but you have no part in us or this faith if you aren't" (compare [Acts 15:5](#), [lesson 10](#)). The Gentiles' full acceptance by God would not be demonstrated by full partnership in Christ's body with the Jews.

### What Do You Think?

How does your congregation demonstrate your welcome of people from all nationalities?

### Digging Deeper

## II. Gospel (Galatians 2:15–21)

### A. Justified by Faith (vv. 15–16)

#### 15. “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles

*Jews* were not alone in considering their teachings to be morally superior to others that were prevalent throughout the Roman Empire. Many things that were considered immoral by Jews were perfectly acceptable for non-Jews in the Greco-Roman environment. This was particularly true regarding sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, and idolatry. The benefit of Jewish moral teaching is why God-fearers—Gentiles who maintained elements of Jewish faith without converting (through circumcision)—existed even before Jesus’ ministry (examples: [Acts 10:2, 22; 13:26; 17:4, 17](#)). These God-fearers rejected the permissive attitudes of other religious teachings and sought instead the higher call of God’s standards. Based on this morally lax, albeit generalized, Gentile background, Paul could set up a dichotomy between Jews and *sinful Gentiles*. But read on, for Paul does not stop here.

**16. “know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.**

Paul set up a dichotomy between Jews and Gentiles in verse 15, but here he tears it down. The key word for our understanding of this passage is *justified*, used three times in this verse alone. While we may be familiar with the religious implications of this word, its background is in the legal world. To be justified in a legal sense is to be declared innocent by a judge. In the context of our relationship with the divine judge, to be justified means that God does not intend to give us the deserved punishment for our sins.

The ultimate weakness of the Judaizing approach was its reliance on how faithfully a person could obey *the law*. Law-keeping itself was often commendable, but it was not a means for justification. After all, a person who kept the law 99.9 percent of the time was still guilty ([James 2:10](#)). Such a person fell short of righteous standing before God (see [Romans 3:23](#)).

The only possible way to be justified is *by faith in Jesus Christ*. Some variation of this phrase occurs three times in this verse. Christians are justified in the eyes of God because they have placed their faith in Christ. This passage is ground zero for the doctrine of justification by faith as opposed to *works*—one of the foundational tenets of Christianity.

There are not two ways of salvation, one for Jews and one for Gentiles (see [Romans 3:9](#)). Jews may decide to keep the law for various valid reasons, but law-observance as a means to salvation is futile. Paul was an accomplished, educated Jew, with deep knowledge of the law and the technicalities of its observance (see [Philippians 3:4–6](#)). If anyone could be justified by the law, it would be Paul! But he taught the impossibility of this approach. In so doing, he undermined the credibility of the Judaizers who had been preaching another gospel to the Galatians (see [Galatians 1:7–8](#)).

## B. Accepting God's Grace (vv. 17–21)

**17. “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!**

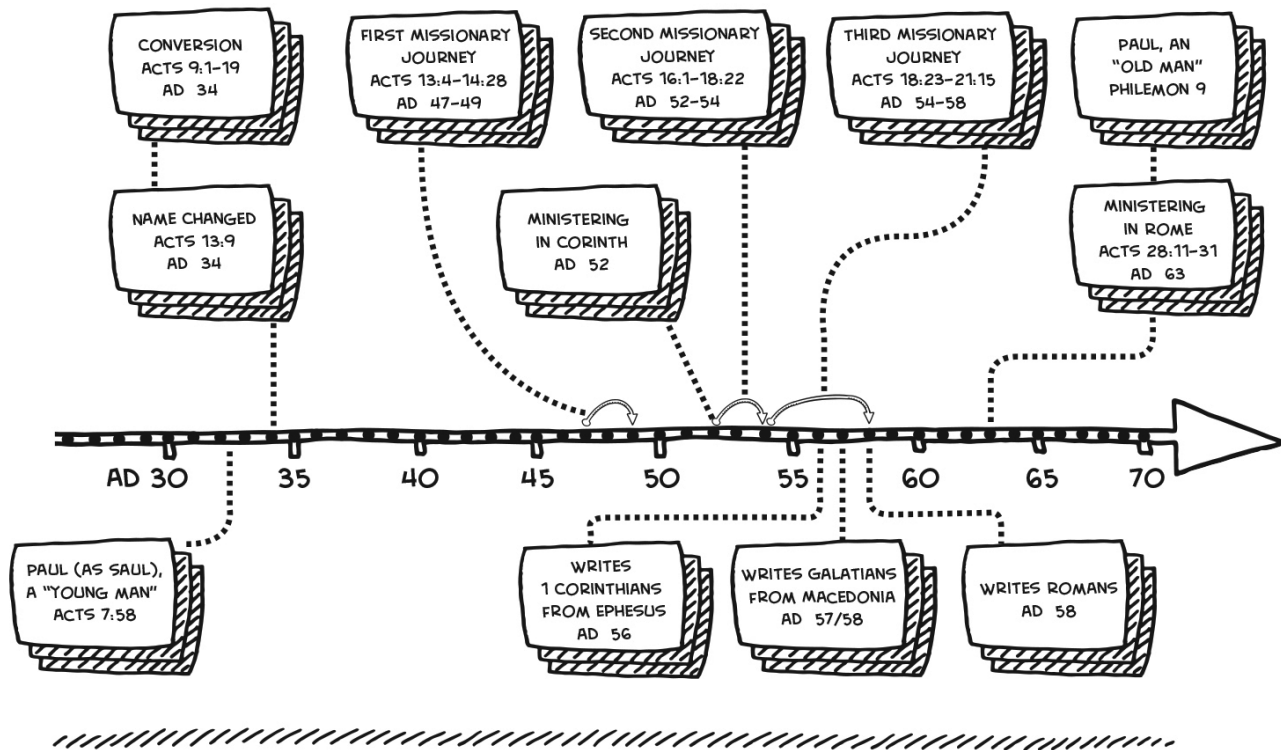
The Judaizers' question might look like this: If keeping the law is not a requirement for Christians, do we not open a door for all the sinful vices of the Gentile world? In other words, if we reduce the law's power, are we not saying that anything goes?

Paul addressed the same question from a different perspective in [Romans 6:1](#): “Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?” In both cases, he used an argument we call *reduction to the absurd*. Paul pressed a mistaken notion to its logical extreme so that the consequences of the error became obvious. In Romans, it is absurd to think that sinning is a good thing if it allows additional grace to be given to us.

In Galatians, it is absurd to think that *Christ promotes sin*. The Judaizers feared that permissiveness regarding Gentiles' need to keep the law would end in immorality. And so, allowing Jews to fellowship with Gentiles apparently without concern for the law must also end in immorality. Though the Judaizers' concern for upright living was commendable, the content of their concern revealed a fundamental misunderstanding of Christ and his work. Could Christ ever be described as a minister of sin, as though what he encouraged his followers to do would lead to sin? If Christ and Paul promote this fellowship, are they promoting sin? In Paul's own words: *absolutely not* (see [Romans 6:2](#))!



# Chronology of the Apostle Paul's Life



Visual for [Lesson 7](#). Go over this time line of Paul's life while discussing the lesson context and leave it posted for reference through [lessons 8-9](#).

## 18. “If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

For Paul, the great sin is not in following the Law of Moses but in believing and teaching that it is a necessary part of being a Christian believer. If Paul were to fall into this trap, he would make himself a *lawbreaker*. This word has the sense of a “nonkeeper” of the law. Ironically, then, Paul would be violating the spirit of the law if he required Gentiles to keep it!

## 19. “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

It is not through *the law* that one finds life. Paul explained this similarly in [Romans 7](#), where he wrote that his attempts to keep the law sometimes served only to inflame his passions for sin, thereby putting him on the road of death. Paul's experience with the law taught him that the law is a *dead end*. No one can be saved by the law because no one can keep it fully and perfectly.

But Jesus' death and resurrection have given us the means to *live for God*. If our focus is on keeping rules rather than serving God, we will be unsuccessful. We will find that our attempts are imperfect and bear only the “fruit for death” ([Romans 7:5](#)). But when a person is born of the Spirit, he or she has a new life ([John 3:6](#)).

**20. “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**

Being *crucified with Christ* is an action that began in the past and has continuing effects in the present and future. It is not merely imitating Christ but rather being conformed to the sufferings of Christ (compare [Romans 8:18](#); [Philippians 3:10–11](#); [Colossians 2:12–14](#)). In Romans, Paul used the symbolism of Christian baptism to illustrate this parallel dying between the believer and Christ: we “were baptized into his death” ([Romans 6:3](#)). When we accept Jesus Christ as the Lord of our lives and trust him for salvation, we are freed from enslavement to sin ([6:6](#)), which before we mistook as living any way we pleased. The old self was controlled by lust, by sinful passions ([Ephesians 4:22](#)). The new life is controlled by Christ, for he lives in us. By uniting with Christ through faith, we have a renewal that leads to becoming the man or woman God created us to be, a person in God’s image (see [Colossians 3:10](#)). We are “dead to sin” ([Romans 6:11](#)), and the pursuit of sinful desires is no longer the controlling factor of our lives.

When we reach this point, the Judaizers’ questions about law and sin begin to seem trivial. The Christian life is not a matter of how well we keep the rules. It is a matter of ongoing submission to the will of God, serving him with all we do and say. Christ, then, is the Christian’s master and Lord. Like Paul, we live for Christ, but Christ does not control us by threats or rules kept with legalistic fervor. We are controlled and motivated by the love of Christ as demonstrated on the cross ([2 Corinthians 5:14](#)).

There is nothing more important to Paul than God’s demonstration of love through Christ’s death. This is why Paul characterized his preaching as “Christ crucified” ([1 Corinthians 1:23](#)), which Paul acknowledged to be a “stumbling block” (offense) to the Jews. It couldn’t be that simple, could it? What about all these rules you need to keep? Is it possible that we can have decent behavior and true, rich fellowship based on our mutual love and faith in Christ? For Paul, the answer is yes.

#### **What Do You Think?**

What evidence do you see that Christ lives in you?

#### **Digging Deeper**

In what areas do you see the Spirit at work recreating you in Christ’s image?

## **Already Dead**

Four masked gunmen burst into our prayer gathering. They shouted at us to get down. They paced around us, making threats. One of the men stopped and pointed his gun at me. He asked, “Do you want to die?”

I felt peace as I answered, “I already have.”

The gunman’s eyes softened, and for a moment I saw the Christian under the actor who had also died with Christ to live a new life. Up to that moment, the simulation felt real. My youth group had gathered in a small room to imitate a hidden church living in a region hostile to Christianity. We were quietly praying and singing together when the gunmen actors burst in.

We have died with Christ, and we live in him. What can you face with confidence, knowing that you have already died?

—N. G.

**21. “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”**

If it were possible to be justified and obtain *righteousness* through *the law*, there would have been no reason for *Christ* to die on the cross. If the Judaizers were right, then the central message of the gospel was rendered ineffective. If we go the path of legalism, believing rule-keeping makes one righteous, then we have destroyed the gospel by nullifying the death of Christ. We are saying, “Jesus, you didn’t really need to die for me. I’ll just clean up my act and justify myself. Self-righteousness is the better way.”

May we never come to the point of despising the death of Christ in this way! To yield to the Judaizing heresy would have been to *set aside the grace of God*, rejecting God’s gracious offer of salvation through Jesus Christ. If we seek to be saved by good works—by our attempts at self-righteousness—then we must realize we are still in our sins and have no promise of life.

#### **What Do You Think?**

How can you bear witness to the gospel to a nonbeliever who is generally regarded to be a “good person”?

#### **Digging Deeper**

Who in your life would benefit from this witness?

## **Conclusion**

### **A. Life in Christ**

Today, we should consider our own conversion. We must remember what Christ did for us in dying to pay sin’s price and thereby treat others with the same grace that he has given to us ([Matthew 18:23–35](#)). Our lives should not be guided by fear of others or a need for prestige, nor by the customs that defined our old, sinful lives. Our life is found in Christ. Our faith is lived out in surrender, trust, and obedience to the will of Jesus, who gave his life for us. This is the motivating factor that changes how we see others. It informs how we react to pressures from others; it frees us from the false doctrine that any self-effort can lead to salvation.

Let us continue in God’s grace, demonstrating the truth of the gospel through our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ ([John 13:35](#)).

### **B. Prayer**

Father, help us live consistently for you so that your gospel might be seen in and through us. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

### C. Thought to Remember

Christ's love moves us to welcome all the faithful to the table.

## Involvement Learning

Enhance your lesson with [NIV Bible Student](#) (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at [www.standardlesson.com](http://www.standardlesson.com) or in the back of the [NIV Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition](#)).

### Into the Lesson

Before students arrive, write the names of well-known celebrities on slips of paper. (You will need one slip for each pair of learners.) Divide learners into pairs, then ask them to plan a dinner party for friends. They should be as detailed as possible, including where the dinner party will happen, dress code, menu, and so on. After a few minutes, give each pair a slip of paper and challenge them to replan their dinner party based on inviting their assigned celebrity. After a few minutes more, gather the groups together. Have a whole-class discussion on how their plans changed when a celebrity was invited to dinner, including whether original guests were excluded. What factors led to these changes? What conditions could lead a person to rightly accuse the host of hypocrisy for changing the event? Examples include: catering from a fancy restaurant instead of serving a home-cooked meal in order to be more impressive; uninviting people who have inelegant manners; etc.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “A Recipe for Winning Arguments” exercise from the activity page, which you can download. Have learners work in pairs to complete as indicated.

Connect this activity with today's lesson by saying, “Sometimes the arrival of someone new can be an unwelcome disruption. Let's learn how Paul addresses a situation like this in his letter to the Galatians.”

### Into the Word

Divide the class in two groups. Ask one group to research Peter's life while the other group researches Paul's life. Have both groups identify the relationship between their assigned apostle and both James and Barnabas. Provide biblical concordances or other research tools for the learners, and supplement with information from the Lesson Context and commentary as needed.

While the pairs work, draw a Venn diagram on the board and label one side *Peter* and the other *Paul*. After about 10 minutes, bring the class together and use the diagram to compare and contrast Peter and Paul's lives. Ask what notable similarities or differences the learners see.

In the same groups as before, have learners read [Galatians 2:11–21](#), then analyze how Peter, Paul, the Jews, and the Gentiles acted in the Scripture passage. Ask them how the histories of these two individuals and of the groups of people they represent help explain the conflict and hypocrisy Paul

pointed out.

Ask a volunteer to reread [Galatians 2:15–21](#). Then lead a class discussion about how Christ brings these factions to himself and what this reveals/reinforces about the gospel.

## Into Life

As a whole class, discuss how to navigate conflict in a way that nurtures both faith and relationship. Consider examples from home, work, or church. What about Paul’s approach would be appropriate for today? After a few minutes, ask the class specifically how the gospel as laid out in today’s text informs how they approach conflict.

Discuss how your congregation models dealing with conflict. What principles of the gospel is this model based on? Allow time after this discussion for prayer regarding any conflict the congregation is experiencing and/or giving thanks for leaders who follow Paul’s example of confronting un-Christ-like behavior.

*Alternative.* Distribute copies of the “Call and Response Prayer” exercise from the activity page. Complete as a whole class. Encourage learners to refer to this exercise throughout the upcoming week.

After either activity, close class with a time of prayer, asking the Father to reveal any hypocrisies so that they can be repented of and discarded.