

Christ Living in Me

Galatians 2:15-21 - NCBC, Easter Sunday
April 16, 2017

Main Point: **Only faith in Jesus' death and resurrection brings new life.**

- Only faith in Jesus justifies you before God (15-16, 21)
- Only faith in Jesus frees you to really live (17-19)
- Only faith in Jesus unites you with Him (20)

Application: **Trust Jesus alone for life!**

Opening Announcements:

<<Cornerstone>>



No matter what's going on in your life these days, it's comforting to know that through the storm – our God of grace is Lord over it all. Our God is a God of life and resurrection – there's never a hopeless situation for the one who has Christ living in them. Christ is our life – and that's why we gather every Sunday morning - to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

I invite you now to prepare for the public reading of Scripture by opening your Bible to **Galatians chapter 2**.



If you don't have a Bible with you this morning, please just raise your hand and one of our ushers will gladly give you a Bible to use. You are welcome to take this Bible home as our gift to you, or just simply return it after our service by placing it on the table in the back of the room. I believe you will find **Galatians 2** bookmarked for you in the Bibles we're handing out this morning.

And while you're finding **Galatians chapter 2** let me add my personal welcome to those of you visiting with us

today. New Castle Bible Church exists for the glory and praise of God. Everything we do here is aimed to help our own hearts become more satisfied in knowing Christ – and help others to become more satisfied in knowing Christ as well. We call it **growing deeper** (into Jesus), and **reaching farther** (with the invitation to know Jesus).

Every Sunday morning we have an opportunity to respond to the revelation of God's Word together. That's what it means to worship. We sing songs to "speak" Biblical truths about God to one another with music. We pray to responsively participate in God's work here on the earth. And we open our hearts to receive the preaching of God's Word so that our living can be transformed by our knowing of Christ.

Typically our preaching works through different Bible books – one paragraph and one verse at a time. Last month we started a new study of Galatians.

So far we've learned that Paul's message of salvation was directly from God, and in unity with the other church leaders from Jerusalem. Paul's good news was that we can be justified or declared righteous – or accepted into God's family – merely by believing on the finished work of Jesus Christ. You don't have to become a Jew, or follow any set of rules to be saved. Christianity is not about pleasing people or being controlled by fear – it's about real freedom. A freedom from legalism that comes from truly knowing Christ and resting in Him.

And so today we're ready for the last paragraph of **Galatians 2** – an amazing section of Scripture that is very appropriate for us to consider on Easter morning.



Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read from the **English Standard Translation** starting in **Galatians 2, verse 15**:

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.

So reads God's Word. You may be seated.

Let's Pray.

Do you ever find yourself deeply frustrated and disappointed by life?¹

You had such high expectations. Such great potential. But the reality of where you're living is far below your original desires and expectations.

This gap between expectation and reality is called disappointment. Or frustration.

Is there any disappointment or frustration in your life today?

In our Scripture this morning, the Apostle Paul is recounting an experience that led to great frustration in his own sending church – the church of Antioch.

¹ For the sake of transparency and with a desire to give credit where credit is due, I have been greatly helped in this message by Pastor Pete Briscoe's message on Galatians 2:20, from the 2015 No Regrets Men's Conference. Several of my illustrations throughout this message were first done by Pastor Pete: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XKb4b38IJDo>

In **verse 11** the Apostle Peter had come from the Jerusalem church to make a field visit to this Gospel outpost on the mission field. The church was so excited to receive Peter, and Peter was thrilled to experience the unity of the Antioch church first-hand. For this church was very culturally diverse – there were Jewish Christians, and there were Gentile Christians – all with unique cultures and traditions, yet living together in real joy and unity.

But **verses 12-13** describe how a group of legalistic Christians showed up at Antioch from Jerusalem – and out of fear Peter started acting like a hypocrite – and the entire Antioch church ended up in severe division – the Jewish Christians on one side, and the Gentile Christians on the other.

The Antioch church had such great potential. But now in reality their very future together was being threatened. What's the answer for overcoming such disappointment and frustration?

I guess one option would be just to lower the expectations. Have you ever tried to deal with your disappointment this way? Bringing the standard down to meet your reality? That's called "Giving up."

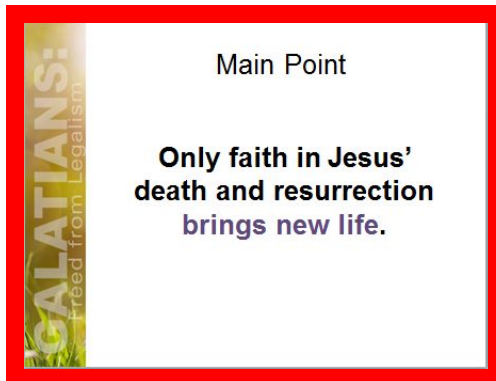
Or another option is just to try harder. Efforting to change your reality in order to meet your expectations. But do you know what that's called? "Impossible."

And so many people live on this miserable swing – swinging back and forth between giving up and attempting the impossible – only to become more and more disappointed and frustrated over time.

But the Scriptures teach us a better way to experience joy and peace this morning. There is hope for our disappointment and frustration. It's called new life. A fresh start. Clean slate. New beginnings. From death to life.

Don't shut your soul to this real hope of resurrection life this morning. Listen carefully and marvel at God's wisdom and all-sufficient provision to you.

Paul's hope to Peter and to all religious hypocrites and legalists today can be summarized by our main point this morning:



Only faith in Jesus' death and resurrection brings new life.

You don't get the life God created for you by either giving up or by trying harder. A life of freedom and joy only comes by faith in the death and resurrection of God's Son – Jesus Christ. The life you're longing for is a new life – a life no longer held down by death.

Let's trace Paul's argument through the text here as we note the significance of trusting in Christ for our life. First, we must understand that,



Only faith in Jesus justifies you before God (15-16, 21)

Now we need to explain what it means to be justified. Because this word has both legal and relational implications for life.

Only faith in Jesus justifies
you before God (15-16, 21)

JUSTIFIED – DECLARED RIGHTEOUS

- “just as if I’d” never sinned
- “just as if I’d” always obeyed

To be justified means to be declared righteous. So note – there are no degrees of justification. No such thing as partial justification. You are either declared righteous, or you are declared guilty. To be justified is to be given the legal verdict of innocence before the Holy Court of God Himself.

To be justified erases the gap between God’s holy expectations for me and my sinful reality. You must be justified to be in right relationship with God. *Legally* you are declared righteous so that *relationally* you can be accepted and welcomed into God’s family.

“Just-as-if-I’d” never sinned and “Just-as-if-I’d” always perfectly met God’s holy requirements.

Now let’s be honest. All of us have sinned haven’t we? **Romans 3:23** is clear that we have all sinned and fallen short of fulfilling God’s creative purpose for our lives.

That’s why **Verse 15** can be a little confusing if you take it out of its context. Because at first reading, it sounds like Paul is saying the Jews aren’t sinners.

But Paul is arguing from the perspective of the Jewish legalists here. He’s saying, if you’re a Jewish legalist – you believe it’s sinful to eat with unwashed hands, to refuse circumcision, and to disregard the Sabbath. So according to the Jewish legalists – all the Gentile Christians were continuing to sin because they didn’t follow the religious practices of the Pharisees.

But, Paul says to Peter in **verse 16** – even good law-keeping Jews know that keeping Moses’ law is not the basis for God declaring them righteous:

We know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul uses the phrase “works of the law” because there’s no Greek equivalent for our word “legalism.” So he’s saying,

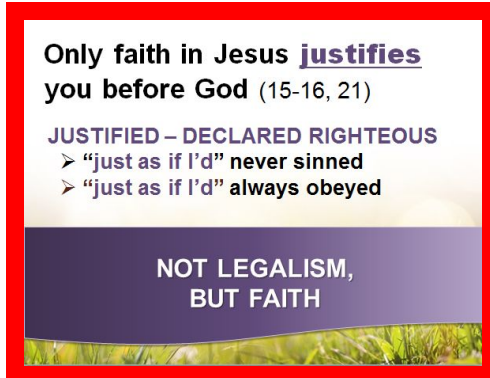
Yet we know that a person is not justified by legalism, but through faith in Jesus Christ,

Legalism is just the word for “trying harder.” Religious self-improvement through outward rule-keeping. If I just give a little more, do more good things and less bad things – then I will be justified before God.

But dear friend – it is impossible to be declared righteous by our Holy God through your own legalistic efforts.

Only faith in Jesus Christ justifies you before God. That's why Paul goes on to chide Peter in the middle of **verse 16**, saying

so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by legalism, because by legalism no one will be justified.



Not legalism, but faith.

Look down at **verse 21** – Paul's point is very clear there,²

If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

² C.f. Romans 3:21

If you believe that any of your human law-keeping is required for you to be saved – then Christ's death was not sufficient, and He died for no purpose at all. If legalism is able to make a person righteous – then Jesus didn't need to die. We just need to try harder.

But it's impossible for us to truly be righteous in God's court on our own. So we are declared righteous and accepted by God into His family – not on the basis of our obedience – but on the basis of Christ's perfect obedience. When Jesus cried out "It is Finished" from the cross – salvation was secured for whosoever believes in Him.

Do you believe in the death and resurrection of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins? Do you believe that when He died and rose – you also really died and rose with Him to a brand new life?

Now you can almost anticipate the legalist's objections to Paul's Gospel:

If you teach justification by faith alone – you're teaching people they don't need to obey God. Look – already in Antioch there's all these Gentile Christians who care nothing for God's dietary, circumcision, and Sabbath laws. Your preaching is just causing people to break the law! Your message of grace only succeeds in making people more sinful!

But Paul knew that,

Only faith in Jesus frees you
to really live (17-19)



Only faith in Jesus frees you to really live (17-19)

Friends – never believe the lie that freedom is the ability to do whatever you want to do. Come visit our prisons with me and I'll show you many who are enslaved to doing what they wanted. Living according to what *you* want is slavery – not freedom.³

Christian freedom isn't the right to do whatever I want. Freedom in Christ is release from the slavery of the law. Emancipation from guilt. No more condemnation. No more legalistic requirement to try harder to be righteous.

Only faith in Jesus' substitutionary work on your behalf frees you to live – as you are freed from the condemnation and guilt of the law.

Basically you could paraphrase **verse 17** this way as Paul continues his argument for new life by faith alone,

³ Romans 7:15-24

So does justification by faith promote sin?⁴ Is sin acceptable for us now because we are not under the law, but under grace?⁵

Is believing in the doctrine of justification by faith alone basically just the same as giving up, and giving in to a life of sin?

Certainly not! God forbid! And then **verse 18** – for if I go back to legalistic self-reliance – after I turned from such religious pride – that's only going to prove me more of a sinner. If you think that sin is merely the violation of social norms and behaviors – you don't comprehend the full problem of sin. At the root, our sin consists of proud unbelief. Self-reliance. Faith in ourselves more than faith in God Himself.

Paul says in **Verse 19** that he died to the law's power and condemnation so that he might live to God! So trusting in Jesus' death and resurrection for your own standing with God is,

⁴ Romans 6:1

⁵ Romans 6:15

Only faith in Jesus frees you
to really live (17-19)

NOT LICENSE TO SIN,
BUT FREEDOM TO LIVE

Not license to sin, but freedom to really live.

And then we get to **verse 20** which punctuates Paul's main point in a way that should cause all of us here today to rejoice. Because,

Only faith in Jesus unites you
with Him (20)

Only faith in Jesus unites you with Him (20)

The freedom of a brand new life only comes by faith in Jesus' death and resurrection, because that faith unites

you with Christ's death and resurrection in a real and transforming way.

Let's read **verse 20** out loud together

Galatians 2:20

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.**

as it comes up on the screens.

And as we read together – consider how faith unites us with Christ's death and resurrection in such a powerful way that our life actually becomes indistinguishable from His life. There's real and powerful newness of life available for you when you believe on Christ.

You don't have work harder. You don't have to give up. You just have to be united with real life.

This is what it means to live by faith!

Please read this verse out loud with me now.

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.

Three years ago I heard Pastor Pete Briscoe preach⁶ on this verse and I'd like to share his illustration with you to help you better understand the wonder of our new life through a faith union with Jesus.

Suppose this old dirty glove represents your life here on earth apart from faith in Christ. The longer you live, the more conscious you became of your own sinfulness. Your soul is dark and separated from God. There's no real power in your life to truly change.

When you read Scripture – all it does is condemn you and rob you of hope. Because there's no enabling power within you to really change.

But you have to do something with your guilt. So somewhere along the line you start to practice legalism. You start to make sacrifices for the purpose of making God happy with you. Maybe you start going to church, you even start reading your Bible and praying regularly. Surely that will make God happy. And you seek to make yourself righteousness and acceptable to God by your own version of religious legalism.

You know what that is? You fill your glove – your earthly life – with mechanical regulations. Just like this

⁶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XXb4b38lJDo>

mechanical hand here. And for a while – you are pretty proud of yourself.

It really seems like you're alive now. People often thank you for how well you wave at them. There's certain parts of the Christian life it seems like you're pretty good at ... but there's still a nagging sinking feeling down in your legalistic soul that at the end of the day you are just being controlled by the opinions of other people. And much of the joyful freedom that Scripture talks about still seems beyond your reach.

So consider **Galatians 2:20** this morning – and understand the wonder of union with Christ! Because new life is only granted to those who believe on Jesus Christ!

Paul says that I have been crucified with Christ. Believing in Jesus unites me in some real yet mysterious way with His crucifixion. The old Kevin dies with Christ and goes into the grave with Him, so that our lives are set free from the power of sin.⁷ My sins are forgiven and I am given a brand new life – as represented by this new white glove.

Now Paul says, *it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.*

One time a Sunday school teacher was trying to teach this verse to the children, and he asked if they thought this glove could pick up the Bible. The children didn't

⁷ Romans 6:3-11

think it was possible – so the teacher told them to watch the glove very carefully as he said in a loud voice – “Glove – pick up the Bible.”

Nothing happened.

“Glove, pick up the Bible.”

Still nothing happened.

Then (slipping the glove on the hand)... “Glove pick up the Bible.”

And amazingly – the glove picked up the Bible!!

One of the students immediately raised their hand – “Do you think we are stupid? The glove didn’t pick up the Bible – your hand did!!”

O children – learn this lesson well this Easter – because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ –

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the glove I live by faith in the Son, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

Faith unites us with Christ in such a real way that Christ now lives His life in us, and through us – just as he promised to the disciples in the upper room on the night before His arrest.⁸

⁸ John 14:19-20.

Notice the profound difference between legalism and life in Christ.

Legalist – Fight sin! (mechanical wave)

Believer – Fight sin! (fist)

Legalist – Love others! (mechanical wave)

Believer – Love others! (thumbs up, hand up)

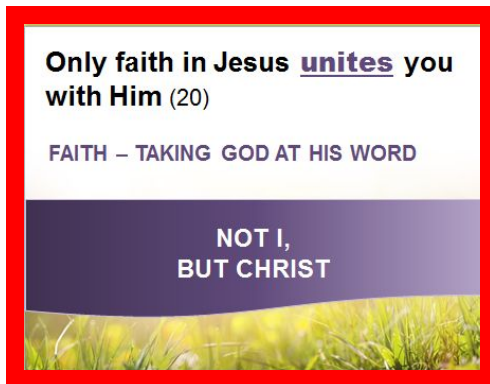
Legalist – Love God! (mechanical wave)

Believer – Love God! (I love you sign towards heaven)

This is the difference between true life – the life God created us to live in Him – and death.

Only faith in Jesus’ death and resurrection can bring new life – because only faith in Christ has the power to unite you with His indwelling Spirit which empowers you to truly live free from sin.

Paul says – *the life I now live in the flesh* – or in the glove
- *I live by faith in the Son of God.*



Faith just means you **take God at His Word**. You believe whatever God says more than what you think, feel, or reason for yourself.

Faith agrees that you are a sinner – condemned to eternal punishment apart from Christ – for this is what God tells us. Faith believes that your sins have been forgiven through the substitutionary atonement of Jesus on the cross – for that is what God says. Faith believes that Jesus is coming back someday to gather together His church and make all the wrongs right in His perfect time for His greatest glory. Faith takes God at His Word.

Why? Because Jesus Christ is the very Son of God – and He loved us, and gave Himself for us.

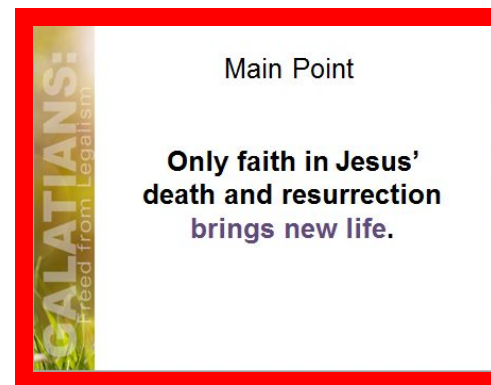
Verse 21 summarizes the end of **verse 20** as the grace of God. And isn't it fascinating to consider the difference between legalism and God's grace this morning?

Legalism always seeks to initiate salvation in the human heart. Man himself must make himself good enough in order to be accepted by a holy God.

But saving grace doesn't start with man's works, does it? It was Christ who loved us – not we who loved Christ. It was Christ who gave Himself for us – not we who gave ourselves for Christ.

No wonder we gather every Sunday morning to celebrate the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Because by faith we are united in Christ's life – and thus have been set free to truly love and live for God's glory and our joy.

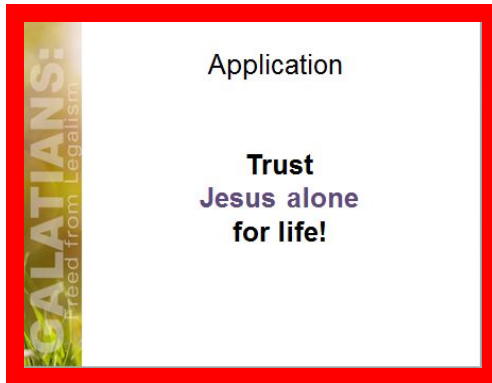
I pray the point of this Scripture is clear to you this morning.



Only faith in Jesus' death and resurrection can bring new life to you.

Repent of all hypocrisy that looks to religious behaviors to add to your righteousness. Believing in Jesus rejects all legalistic supplements.

In other words, you must



Trust Jesus alone for life!

Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can be accepted by God apart from a faith union with Him.⁹

So trust in Jesus alone for your salvation. But also make sure dear Christian that you are trusting in Christ alone for your daily spiritual growth as well. For by faith you have been united with Christ's victory, Christ's sufficiency, Christ's love.

Christ is now in you – the hope of Glory Himself.

Do you believe this?

⁹ John 14:6

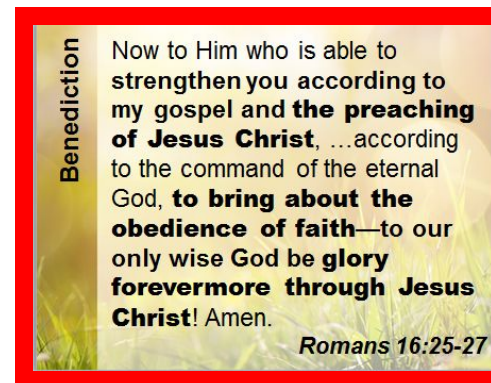
Let's pray.



Please help yourself to one of the connecting clips at doors as our Easter gift to you.

Let's pray our Benediction now as we are dismissed,

Benediction



*Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, ...according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith— 27 to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen. **Romans 16:25-27***



Recommended Resources on Christ Living in Me:

- Job 9:2
- Psalm 143:2, 11
- Habakkuk 2:4
- John 14:19-20; 15:1-11
- Acts 13:39
- Romans 1:17; 3:20, 28-30; 5:1; 6:1-6; 7:4-6; 8:3-4
- Galatians 1:4; 3:11; 5:24; 6:14
- Philippians 3:6, 9
- Colossians 2:20
- Hebrews 10:38
- 1 John 4:19

- <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/publications/justification>
- <http://www.desiringgod.org/labs/free-in-christ-jesus>
- <https://www.gotquestions.org/crucified-with-Christ.html>

- *Transforming Grace*, Jerry Bridges
- *The Whole Christ*, Sinclair Ferguson

Growing Deeper: Life Group Questions

1. Read Galatians 2:20. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? What does it mean to live by faith in Jesus?
2. Select one or more of the listed Scriptures above to read aloud. Discuss together how these verses help explain Paul's argument in Galatians 2:15-21.
3. Read Galatians 2:16. Explain Paul's teaching on justification. Is justification an act or a process (Romans 5:1)? Who/what justifies us (Romans 8:33)? Who can be justified, and by what means (Romans 4:5)?

4. Read Galatians 2:21. Where are you most tempted to trust in your religious performance *along with* your faith for your acceptance with God? Are you functionally despising God's grace towards you, and if so, why?
5. Read Galatians 2:20. How do you respond to the truth that God's Messiah loves you and gave Himself for you?