

Adult Teaching Resources

June 12, 2016



Getting On in Galatia: Paul's Angriest Letter (May 29-July 3)

Saul's Call Makes Paul — Galatians 1:11-24

Do You Feel "Justified"? — Galatians 2:15-21

No More Lines — Really? — Galatians 3:19-29

What Will Prevail? — Galatians 5:1, 13-25

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Do You Feel “Justified”?

Galatians 2:15-21

FIT Teaching Guide

by Rick Jordan

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Before the Lesson: Make copies of the handout, “Peter, Paul, and Works — Why Should I Care?” for the Transformational Exercise.

Fellowship Question

Use *one* of the following to break the ice, to begin discussion, and lead into the study:

Who is someone you have called on to help you do something you could not do alone?

What is one subject you know absolutely nothing about? (Something you would have to get help from someone else.)

Information

“God helps those who help themselves.” Believe it or not, that’s not in the Bible; however, it is a key thesis in many an American’s theology.

What do you think of that statement?

What if we changed the statement to, “God helps *only* those who help themselves”?

What if we changed it to, “God helps those who help themselves *only*”?

As Paul writes the churches in Galatia, he is writing to people who are struggling with who God approves and how God makes things right. “How can we help ourselves when it comes to making things right with God?” was the question many in the early church wrangled over.

Paul was a key leader in the early church. So were Peter and James. All seem to have been headstrong and blessed with an overabundance of self-confidence. To understand this part of Paul’s letter, we need to recall Paul’s visit to Jerusalem.

Peter was the top leader in the Jerusalem church. After his vision of ritually “unclean” animals which God told him to kill and to eat, Cornelius (a Gentile centurion) sent for him. Peter went to this Gentile’s home. He took some heat for doing this from some in the church who believed that the gospel was for the Jews.

[Have a class member read Acts 11:1-18.]

Information *continued*

This was a radical departure from the normal habit of Jews. Peter and other followers of Jesus were learning that the gospel of Jesus is for everyone. It seems that everyone was on board with Peter.

However, religious traditions die hard. And, in any religion, before long there grows a system to determine who is “in” or “out.” Among those who are “in,” there grows a hierarchy to determine who is “superior,” “good,” or “inferior.”

[Have a class member read Acts 15:1, 5.]

Remember that the earliest followers of Jesus, a Jew, were Jews. They were not planning to create a new religion. Even Jesus did not ask that of them. So, there are “some believers who belonged to the sect of the Pharisees.” They were Jews who followed the way of Jesus, but also kept the Jewish law.

[Have a class member read Acts 15:6-11.]

The group that gathered to discuss this issue consented with Peter’s insights.

Then, something happened. Peter “backslid.” We do not have the actual story of this, but we discover it as we read Paul’s letter to the Galatian churches. (Paul calls Peter “Cephas” in this passage. This is the Aramaic word for stone, which was the nomenclature Jesus gave Simon Peter.)

[Have a class member read Galatians 2:11-14.]

Peter backslid “for fear of the circumcision faction.” What do you think Peter was afraid of? (rejection of “his people”; physical harm; that he would be no longer considered a good practitioner of Judaism; etc.)

Paul’s charge was that Peter was “living like a Gentile” but requiring Gentiles to “live like Jews.”

Jews had distinctive ceremonies and traditions that gave them their identity. These were tied to their faith. From what you know of the Jewish faith, what are some of these distinctives? (keeping the Sabbath; circumcision; kosher food restrictions; Temple sacrifice; remaining “pure,” etc.)

Modern Biblical scholars who are re-examining the New Testament through the Jewish lens are called “New Perspective” scholars. From them, we are learning that modern interpretations of ancient Judaism are greatly shaped by classic Reformation interpretations. John Calvin, Martin Luther, and other Reformers were battling the Roman Catholic church’s teaching that certain works could lead to justification with God. If you gave enough offerings/ indulgences, you could escape Hell or Purgatory. If you made significant physical sacrifices, God would love you and bless you more. If you helped yourself, God would help you. The Reformer’s reaction to this was to emphasize faith over works. We trust in God because of God’s love and grace. Nothing we can do can earn our salvation. However, this emphasis skewed Protestants’ interpretation of ancient Judaism. When “works of the Law” was read,

Information *continued*

they interpreted it to mean “the method of salvation” (such as the Roman Catholic’s works), when it actually meant something different.

“‘Works of the Law’ are...seen as badges of identity and Torah-practices that erect boundaries between Jews and gentiles. In other words, ‘works of the Law’ focus on those practices that give them a special identity; but Paul received an inclusive gospel, and this forced ‘works of the Law’ to be contrary to God’s will.” (Scot McKnight. “The Ego and ‘I’: Galatians 2:19 and the New Perspective.” *Word and World*. Volume XX. Number 3. Summer 2000. p. 275.)

There are certain “works” that give us a sense of identity. Consider “works of patriotism.” What are some things we do that unite us as a nation? (Stand for national anthem; salute flag; recite pledge of allegiance; sing national anthem at a ball game, etc.)

There are “Church works” that we do that give us a sense of religious identity. Some are universal, others are distinctive to our particular branch of Christianity. What are some of the things we do that unite us as Christians/denomination? (recite Lord’s prayer; sing the Doxology, recite Psalm 23 at a funeral; sing Amazing grace by memory; baptism and Lord’s Supper — and our particular denomination’s way of celebrating these; etc.)

For the ancient Jews, religion and state were united. Imagine you are on a search committee for a new minister and your candidate insists that she will not stand if the Star Spangled Banner is played. How would you feel about that?

Even if we are strong supporters of the separation of the institutions of Church and State, this may give us pause. Likewise, if the candidate said that they would never lead the congregation in celebrating the Lord’s Supper. Would that fly in your church?

These type of actions are deeply symbolic and go to our sense of identity. Whether you stand or don’t for the national anthem does not affect your citizenship. But refusing to do such things does call to question your loyalty to the party line.

“Scholars are fairly unanimous in contending that ‘works of the law’ refers to observances of the Torah, acts of individual Israelites that conform to the law of Moses (e.g., Exodus 20-24). At this point in the discussion, however, the road forks; for some, notably the classical reformation scholars, the term expresses *motive*, the attempt to gain approval by God by performance, while for the new perspective the term has a *sociological* focus...[C]ertain kinds of ‘works’, namely acts like Sabbath, circumcision, food laws, and various sorts of purity...are *expressions of allegiance to Torah as identifying the people of God in their distinction from ... gentiles.*” (McKnight, 276f.)

For Paul, then, to insist that Gentiles must submit to Jewish “works of Law” is going backwards. God’s grace through Jesus Christ is for everyone. It is not a sin to follow Jesus and his liberating teachings. It is a sin to force Gentiles to submit to covenantal “identity badges” (such as circumcision) and works of the Law (such as Sabbath).

[Have a class member read Galatians 2:15-18.]

Information *continued*

So, we have the covenant, which came through Abraham. We have the Law, which came through Moses. And, now, we have a New Covenant which comes through our faith in Jesus Christ.

For Paul, this tie to Jesus is much deeper than a covenant or works. It is an unfathomable relationship in which God came to be *with* us as Jesus Christ and then God lives *in* us through the Holy Spirit.

“The heart of Paul’s religion is union with Christ. This, more than any other conception — more than justification, more than sanctification, more than reconciliation — is the key which unlocks the secret of his soul...If one seeks for the most characteristic sentences the apostle ever wrote, they will be found, not in refuting the legalists, or vindicating his apostleship, or meditating on eschatological [last days] hopes, or giving practical ethical guidance to the Church, but where his intense intimacy with Christ comes to expression. Everything that meant religion for Paul is focused for us in such words as these: ‘I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me’ (Gal 2:20); ‘There is, therefore, no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus.’ (Romans 8:1) ‘He that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.’ (1 Corinthians 6:17)” (James Smart. *A Man In Christ*. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House. 1975. p. 147.)

[Have a class member read Galatians 2:19-20.]

What does Paul mean by “I have been crucified with Christ”? Obviously, he is not speaking literally. Two other men were on either side of Jesus in his crucifixion, but the apostle Paul was not one of them. This must have to do, then, with something symbolic or mystical. How does the idea of union with Christ inform this profession, “I have been crucified with Christ”? (As Jesus died to conquer sin’s power, Christ through Paul conquers sin; As Jesus died to conquer death, Christ through Paul offers eternal life; Jesus’ death changes Paul’s identity as a covenant and works Jew, to a Jew who trusts in Christ for his salvation, so his prior identity is crucified, etc.)

This union with Christ changes how we must think about God and our relationship to God. The reason Paul blasts Peter, James, and anyone else who wants to keep the “works of the Law” as central to their identity is that, in Jesus, our identity is radically changed.

“What led Paul into a different form of Judaism that created sufficient tension to force an eventual break with Judaism was the focusing of faith and the redemptive plan of God on Jesus Christ. Justification, or redemption, no longer comes through Moses nor through the Torah...but through Jesus Christ. [Thus,] the faith of Israel was no longer defined by an ethnic Israel. What began as an inclusive table fellowship with Jesus becomes under the brilliant insight of Paul an inclusive gospel of justification by faith for all who believe.” (McKnight, 275.)

Transformational Exercise

[Distribute the handout, “Peter, Paul, and Works — Why Should I Care?”]

For the majority of those in our class, the concern Paul has about not keeping Jewish laws are irrelevant. We who were not born as Jews have probably never had these worries.

However, the text is relevant to us in the way we answer these three reflective questions.

1. How do I live my identity as a follower of Jesus? Am I identified by my doctrine, my works, my religious heritage? Or, is my identity based on Christ living in and through me?
2. Am I acting inclusively, welcoming all into God’s love and God’s Church?
3. Is my lived-out-faith consistent with Jesus’ grace-based faith?

To this last point, one blogger says, “It seems to me that the ‘myth’ that Paul was addressing is the idea that ‘God helps those who help themselves.’ I think many people view the Christian faith from this perspective—as if it were some kind of barter system, where we exchange going to church and helping the less fortunate and giving our income so that God will in the end give us eternal life in paradise. It is the idea that we have to justify ourselves somehow—in this case by what we do. But that really is not consistent with the way in which the Bible presents the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, or the God and father of our Lord and Savior Jesus the Christ. From beginning to end, God acts out of mercy and love and grace and compassion. Everything that God does on our behalf comes solely out of that steadfast love that endures forever; not as a reward for anything that even the most pious people do—not even Abraham!” (<http://thewakingdreamer.blogspot.com/2010/06/helping-ourselves-gal-215-21-lk-726-50.html>)

For the next few minutes of silence, reflect on these three questions. As you do, ask God’s Spirit to help you be more and more open to let yourself “be crucified with Christ.”

“Therefore we have been buried with him through baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his.” (Romans 6:4-5)

[After some time for reflection and prayer, close in a prayer something like this: *God, twenty one centuries after Paul, even we are tempted to tie other things to our identity as your followers. Some of us are tempted to tie American nationalism to you. Others of us are tempted to tie our pet doctrines that others must accept if we will accept them. Forgive us for forgetting that our life in you is due to your grace alone. Give us the faith to believe that and to live that. Amen.*]

Comments or Questions for Rick Jordan? You may send comments to the lesson plan author at rjordan@cbfnc.org. Rick is also available to lead workshops and conferences on Christian Education, with particular emphasis on how best to use the FIT Faith model.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartlege

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartlege, printed in *Baptists Today*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Baptists Today* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Baptists Today* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Simon, Peter, or Cephas? — Peter’s given name was “Simon bar Jonah” (Matt. 16:17), meaning “Simon son of Jonah,” but Jesus gave him the nickname “Cephas” (Aramaic) or “Peter” (Greek *petros*), meaning “Rock.” Jesus put a lot of trust in Peter, to the extent of declaring “Upon this rock I will build my church” (Matt. 16:18).

Antioch — The church in Antioch originated with Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who had fled there following the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6-7). While some believers scattered through the nearby regions of Judea and Samaria (Acts 8:1-3), another group migrated north to Antioch, the capital of Syria and possibly the third largest city in the Roman Empire at that time (Acts 11:19-26).

In Antioch, according to Luke, the believers continued to worship and proclaim Christ, at first to Jews only, but later to Greeks also, with impressive results: “The hand of the Lord was with them, and a great number became believers and turned to the Lord” (Acts 11: 21). When church leaders in Jerusalem heard what was happening there, they sent Barnabas to investigate. Barnabas rejoiced in what he saw and set out for Tarsus to find Saul and bring him back to work in the productive fields of Antioch. The two of them remained there for a year, laboring among a people who were in the vanguard of understanding that Jews and Gentiles could worship and work together.

As Marion L. Soards and Darrell Pursiful described it, “It was in Antioch, therefore, that the lines between Jewish and non-Jewish believers in Jesus first began to blur. Oneness in Christ began to transcend ethnic and cultural barriers. Believers in Jesus could not longer be classified merely as a particular kind of Jew, and therefore the word ‘Christian’ was coined to describe his increasingly diverse band of disciples (Acts 11:26).” (*Galatians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentaries [Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2015], 108).

A proposition — Some writers consider Gal. 2:15-21 to be the governing “propositional statement” of the entire letter to the Galatians. If we can grasp Paul’s meaning here, we have a clue to interpreting the remainder of the book.

Sinners — Purists within Judaism believed that fellowship with sinners was equivalent to a sin itself. Recall how the Pharisees criticized Jesus for “eating with tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 9:11, 11:19; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30, 7:34). The word “sinner” was used to describe anyone, Jew or Gentile, who did not scrupulously follow the rabbinic law. In their eyes, the act of consorting with sinners (again, with people who did not keep the law) was reprehensible behavior.

For Paul, laying aside the requirements of the law was a way of acknowledging that Christ had torn down the ritual barrier between humans and God. To re-erect it would be a sin, indeed, and Paul wanted the Galatians to avoid that trap (Gal. 2:17-18).

Digging Deeper *continued*

Through the law, to the law — Paul’s statement in v. 19 is a puzzle: “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ ...” How does one die *to* the law, *through* the law? Perhaps the closing line of the verse, “I have been crucified with Christ,” provides an interpretive key. Paul saw the law and Christ as being diametrically opposed. Christ’s death was instigated by those who sought to defend the law, and so Christ died under the curse of the law. When Paul said “I have been crucified with Christ,” perhaps he was suggesting that he also died to his old way of trusting in the law, so that he might live instead with Christ.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartlege

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“Is it “faith in Christ,” or “the faithfulness of Christ”?”

One of the most heated debates in Pauline studies has to do with the interpretation of the phrase *pistis Christou*, which occurs twice in Gal. 2:16 as well as in Gal. 2:20, 3:22; Rom. 3:22, 26; and Phil. 3:9. The phrase can be legitimately translated as speaking of “faith in Christ” or “faithfulness of Christ.” From a grammatical standpoint, the debate revolves around whether the expression should be read as a Greek subjective genitive, in which Christ is the subject who shows faith, or an objective genitive, in which Christ is the object of faith. The latter view has been predominant in the interpretive tradition, but several recent commentaries have questioned it.

Translating the phrase as a subjective genitive puts the focus on Christ’s own faithfulness to staying the course as the key to our justification. Taking it as an objective genitive emphasizes the believer’s exercise of faith in Christ as the doorway to salvation. Both are legitimate: there is no question that Paul believed persons should exercise faith in Christ, but he also understood that our faith would matter little if not for Christ’s faithfulness seen through his incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and continued presence through the Holy Spirit.

Marion Soards and Darrell Pursiful argue that one should examine theological as well as grammatical considerations. They conclude that “the faithfulness of Christ” is the primary sense, because it creates the possibility of humans putting “faith in Christ.” They conclude: “It is *the faith of Jesus Christ* that brings *faith in Jesus Christ* into being. These two (“faith of” and “faith in”) exist together, but one is theologically prior to the other in Paul’s vision of God’s justifying work with humanity in and through Jesus Christ.” (*Galatians*, Smyth & Helwys Bible Commentaries [Macon: Smyth & Helwys, 2015], 94).

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