

GALATIANS 2:1-21

Acceptance, Conflict, and Identity in the Family of Christ

Memory Verse

"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."

Galatians 2:20

Real-life Problems

Prejudice

Consciously and subconsciously, we all struggle with certain prejudices and biases against other people. Whether it's people who look different, think different, or act different, we're all guilty of judging others and proudly elevating ourselves. Even worse, we can turn cultural biases into religious norms, which can be especially harmful toward brothers and sisters in Christ.

The Good News

Jesus lived, died, and rose again to pay the immeasurable debt of our sin. In one act, He justified us before God forever, and at the same time, He redeemed our lives on earth, and He dwells in us, working to make us more like Him. Because this was Jesus' work and not our own, and we know that we are all sinners, there is no cause for pride, prejudice, or discrimination. In the eyes of God, the Judge, we are redeemed, so we have no cause to judge one another.

I. Introduction

OPENING QUESTIONS

Idea #1: What does peer pressure look like? Have you ever experienced peer pressure one way or another?

Idea #2: Have you ever had to confront a friend who wronged you?

Idea #3: Do you tend to be a rule-follower or a rebel? Can you think of an example?

PRAY

Open your time together in prayer.

REHEARSING THE GOSPEL

What does gospel mean?

Good news

What's the good news?

Jesus died for my sins

Why did He die for your sins?

So that I can have abundant life in relationship with Him now and forever

What is grace?

God's love for undeserving sinners

REVIEW

1) Who wrote the book of Galatians?

The apostle Paul wrote Galatians. In the early church, an apostle was someone sent with divine authority, and Paul received his message directly from Jesus (Gal 1:12, 15–23).

2) Who was the original audience?

Paul wrote "to the churches in Galatia" (v. 2), indicating a number of churches scattered throughout the region of Galatia in central Turkey. Many members of Paul's original audience were Gentile converts to Christianity.

3) Why was the letter to the Galatians written?

Paul wrote to correct and encourage the churches, which had been divided by theological and racial issues because of false teachers.

What's going on?

REMIND

In Galatians 1, Paul reminded us that there is only one gospel: the good news that Jesus lived, died, and rose again to deliver us from sin and draw us into relationship with God. Writing to the Galatians, Paul was concerned about false teachers, and he used his personal testimony as a witness to God's grace, and to establish his authority from God.

TODAY WE'LL LEARN

Today, we pick up with more of Paul's autobiographical account that further establishes his authority. Traveling to Jerusalem, Paul meets with the other apostles for encouragement and accountability. Later, Paul has to confront Peter, who has been led into hypocrisy by false teachers and racial prejudices. Finally, Paul outlines the gospel of grace in more detail, noting that we now belong to Christ, who dwells in us.

- 1) The early church was unified in preaching the gospel of grace (vv. 1-10)
- 2) Cultural prejudices can derail and distract us from gospel truths (vv. 11-14)
- 3) We are saved and made new by God's grace (vv. 15-21)

Read

Read **Galatians 2:1-21** aloud in your group.

II. Questions for Discussion

A. WHAT?

1) How many years pass before Paul returns to Jerusalem? Who comes with him? Who does he visit in Jerusalem?

After 14 years, Paul returned to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. He went to visit the church in Jerusalem, specifically church leaders, including Peter, James, and John (v. 9).

2) What does Paul accuse the "false brothers" of attempting to do? What does Jesus offer instead (v. 4)?

They wanted to "bring us into slavery" by forcing all Christians, including Gentile converts, to follow the Jewish law. This contrasts sharply with the "freedom that we have in Christ Jesus," who has freed us from bondage to the law.

3) Individually or in groups, construct a "T" chart with "slavery" on one side and "freedom" on the other.

What words, phrases, or images come to mind under each category?

Answers may vary. Spend some time here allowing students to really picture the slavery vs. freedom image. This image will be repeatedly used throughout the letter, so spending some time "getting it" here will help students make connections later.

4) What conclusion is reached between Paul and the leaders in Jerusalem in verses 6-7? What else is agreed upon in verse 10?

First, they all agree that they are preaching the same gospel, which Paul reminds us of in verse 16: "we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ." The apostles agree that Peter has been called to lead ministry to Jewish people, while Paul has been called to teach the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter, James, and John, the three leaders of the church in Jerusalem, support and endorse Paul's mission and teaching.

Second, the apostles all agree that Christians are called "to remember the poor" (v. 10). As Christians, we are unified by the gospel, and by our call to care for the poor.

5) What happens between Peter and Paul in Antioch? What had Peter done (vv. 11-14)?

Peter acted hypocritically and was led astray by bad influences and personal prejudices. Though he knew that Gentiles were equal brothers in Christ, he began to treat them differently and stopped eating with them. As such, Paul "opposed him to his face," and confronted Peter for his sin and racial prejudice, reminding him of the true gospel in verses 14-21.

6) To be "justified" means to be declared right before God, to be deemed guiltless of our sin. According to verse 16, how are we justified?

"Not by works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ." No action or deed we do will add to or detract from our justification before God by the blood of Christ.

One helpful image is a courtroom: we are the people on trial, and God is the Judge. We deserve to be condemned to death for our sins, but by the death of Jesus, God the Judge acquits us and declares us

righteous. We deserve the guilty verdict, but by faith in Christ, God declares us righteous and sees us like He sees His Son.

7) What does verse 20 tell us about our new relationship to Jesus?

Our old lives of sin and slavery to the law have been crucified with Christ on the cross, and now, we are a new creation. Martin Luther explains that this means "Christ crucified the devil, He killed death, condemned sin, and bound the law; and I believing this, am delivered from the law, sin, death, and the devil." By believing in Christ, we are no longer bound to Mosaic law, to sin, or to death itself because Christ has overcome them all. He died in our place, and now, miraculously, Jesus lives in us, dwells in us, and transforms us into His image.

B. SO WHAT?

1) Why does Paul return to Jerusalem? Is he concerned that he has been preaching the wrong gospel?

At first glance, it may seem like Paul is worried that he needs to 'double check' that his gospel aligns with theirs. But this isn't the case. He knows that his gospel comes straight from God (Gal 1:11-12), and he had been preaching it for over 15 years now. Pastor Tim Keller says, "Nothing was threatening Paul's certainty, but something was threatening his fruitfulness." In this time, there were many false teachers offering contradictory messages and threatening the gospel, and Paul wanted to make sure that the church in Jerusalem had not been led astray. Though he did not need the support of the church in Jerusalem, having the endorsement of the other apostles would give him extra credibility in the eyes of Jewish converts. Moreover, for the sake of the gospel, Paul wants to make sure that the church in Jerusalem—the first church to form after Jesus' death—was still preaching the same message.

2) Why is it significant that Titus is an uncircumcised Greek (v. 3)? What false teaching is Paul concerned about in verses 4-5?

The leaders in the church in Jerusalem were all Jewish converts, and they ministered to a Jewish audience. Titus, being a Greek and a Gentile, did not grow up under Jewish law, but he was a believer in Jesus all the same. In many ways, he was a living case study for the issue dividing the church: should Gentile converts be forced to follow Jewish law? When Titus visited Jerusalem with Paul, he "was not forced to be circumcised" (v. 3). In other words, the leaders in Jerusalem did not make him submit to Jewish law. Titus is the decisive answer to the question at hand, demonstrating that Christians are not subject to Jewish law.

3) Why does Paul oppose Peter, beginning in verse 11? What does he accuse Peter of doing and not doing (v. 14)?

Originally, Peter would eat with Gentiles when he came to Antioch. Then, one day, a group of Jewish Christians visited, and Peter "separated himself." He stopped eating with the Gentiles. As an influential leader in the church, Peter's actions led others astray as well, including Barnabas and other Jews. Though Peter knew that Gentiles were equal to Jews, he still acted hypocritically.

In what was surely an epic clash, Paul publicly calls Peter out for his sinful and prejudicial behavior. Paul "saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel," and he urges Peter to remember the truth of the gospel. Rather than outlining exactly what is wrong with Peter's behavior, Paul simply reminds him of the gospel, and allows the gospel truth to convict him.

The Butter Battle Book

In 1984, Dr. Seuss gave the world *The Butter Battle Book*, a goofy, tongue-twisting classic that, in typical Dr. Seuss fashion, offered powerful lessons for kids and adults alike. Written as a satire for the Cold War, the book pits the Yooks vs. the Zooks in a tense yet amusing arms race. But what divides the Yooks from the Zooks and the Zooks from the Yooks with so much animosity?

As one Yook tells his grandson, "It's high time you knew of the terribly horrible thing that Zooks do. In every Zook house and in every Zook town, every Zook eats his bread with the butter side down." The Yooks, on the other hand, eat their bread with the butter side up.

At first glance, this seems like a silly quarrel that is blown out of proportion. But when we look at our own lives, we see that the smallest differences can cause the biggest problems. The early church fathers were deeply divided ethnically (Jew vs. Gentile) and doctrinally (justification by faith alone vs. justification by faith plus adherence to ceremonial laws of the old covenant), and our church remains divided today.

In the book and in real life, food is an arena for prejudices to shine. Just as Yooks and Zooks battle over butter, Peter refused to eat with his Gentile brothers in Christ. In America, some white Christians once refused to eat at the same restaurants as black Christians. But Paul wants to remind us of what really matters: the gospel. Everything else is as trivial as toast with the butter side down.

4) Why was Peter led astray? What do verses 14-16 tell us about how Peter failed, and how we are called to live today?

First, we see that Peter was "afraid" of certain members of the "circumcision party" (v. 12). This fear drives him to be a follower rather than a leader, and he goes along with a prejudicial practice that he knows is wrong.

Second, because Peter had grown up following Jewish law, he had been taught to believe that Gentiles were unclean and not a part of God's chosen people. Jewish cultural customs were often twisted to justify prejudices against Gentiles, and Jews like Peter struggled to grow beyond these embedded prejudices—even though God had revealed to Peter in a dramatic vision (Acts 10) that the Gentiles were no longer unclean.

Though it may have been unconscious, Peter's cultural and racial prejudices pitting Jew against Gentile popped up, and he was unable to see clearly. Though Peter knew what was right, he was afraid of the peer pressure—even from fellow Christians—and he fell back on his prejudices and was afraid to stand up for what was right. Peter, the rock of the church and close friend of Jesus, struggled to fight against his own racism. In the midst of our own struggles, this should give us some comfort, knowing that even Peter had to be regularly reminded of these sins. However, Paul offers hope, emphasizing that these prejudices do not fall in line with the gospel truth, and he boldly spoke out even when it seemed like he was all alone. Christ's death on the cross is the only way anyone can be justified, regardless of race, background, or moral behavior.

5) What does it mean that we are justified by faith (v. 16)? Does this give us a blank check to go and sin as much as we want (vv. 17-19)?

It means that we are made right in the eyes of God. Through Jesus' death on the cross, He paid the price for our sin that we could never pay, no matter how well we follow moral laws. By faith in God's gracious sacrifice, we are justified, not by anything we do. At the same time, God's grace does not give us an excuse to go and sin as much as we want. This was likely the main counterattack from the people of the "circumcision party" who had led Peter astray, and Paul publicly addresses their concerns in verses 17-18. As Christians, we are justified by Christ, but we also know that we are still sinners here on earth. However, that does not make Jesus a "servant"

or "minister" of sin! He is a servant and savior of sinners, but He does not serve or endorse sin. Moreover, if Paul were to try to rebuild the law, or build another way to God by doing good things, he would be sinning. We can't add anything to Jesus' death on the cross, and it is prideful to think that we can add something that He could not. There is one means of justification, and that is through the blood of Jesus.

6) What do verses 19-21 tell us about the law? As sinners justified by faith, how is our life changed?

Paul had followed the law as closely as he could, and he knew that even his best efforts came up empty. Likewise, our best efforts to be justified through the law will always come up short. The law will never justify us, but only show us our guilt before God. Instead, if we trust in the cross of Christ, we are crucified with Jesus and born again, with Christ dwelling in us. It is no longer we who live, but Christ in us, with us every second of every day. As a result, though we are still sinners on earth, we are set free to follow God with all of our hearts and not out of guilt or shame. Moreover, because the law helped to reveal our own sin, when we are set free from the law, we are freed to walk alongside our fellow sinners, knowing that we are no better than they. There is no room to judge or hold "sinners" at a distance when we realize that we are all sinners before God, and yet He loves us all the same.

C. NOW WHAT?

1) How do cultural prejudices affect you individually and collectively today? As a group, how do you see racial, economic, sexual, political, or other cultural differences hindering the truth of the gospel? How do Christian communities hold prejudices against one another? Have you ever seen someone different from you and thought, thank goodness I'm not like them?

Answers may vary. One of the most common ways Christians act prejudicially today are toward "sinners," whether they are Christian or not. Whether it's from parents, pastors, or students, how often do we judge one another for things like drunkenness, premarital sex, homosexuality, or other public sins? How often do we use those things as an excuse to distance ourselves from that person rather than loving them and walking alongside them?

As common prejudices are identified, spend some time repenting as a group and leading students toward repentance.

2) Do you ever feel like you can perform your way into God's salvation? That if you behave well enough, God will have to reward you? On the other hand, do you worry that you can lose His favor when you sin? How does the doctrine of justification by faith change your outlook?

3) What does it mean for you to walk in step with the truth of the gospel (v. 14)? To live as though Christ dwells in you (v. 20)? Is there anything you're holding on to that you need to "crucify" so that Christ can dwell in you? How does this calling differ from trying to earn God's approval?

Main takeaway

There is only one gospel, and it has always been the same good news that Jesus died on the cross to save us from our sins. No longer are we justified by following the law, but now, we are justified by faith in Christ, who saves us by His grace. Moreover, God's grace is transformative, working to heal us of our brokenness and prejudices, and Christ Himself dwells in us here on earth.

III. Closing

REMEMBERING THE GOOD NEWS

Jesus lived, died, and rose again to pay the immeasurable debt of our sin. In one act, He justified us before God forever, and at the same time, He redeemed our lives on earth, and He dwells in us, working to make us more like Him. Because this was Jesus' work and not our own, and we know that we are all sinners, there is no cause for pride, prejudice, or discrimination. In the eyes of God, the Judge, we are redeemed, so we have no cause to judge one another.

CLOSE IN PRAYER

Father God, we thank You and praise You for the abundance of Your grace, poured out for us on the cross. We pray that You will reveal to us and heal us from our various prejudices, and forgive us for how we have wronged others. Help us to trust that we are saved and transformed by Your grace alone, and walk with us as we depart today. Amen.

Supporting Resources

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- 1) Have you experienced peer pressure one way or another in your walk with Christ? Have you felt yourself being pushed or pulled back into prejudices along racial, religious, political, or social lines? Take a few minutes for honest reflection and, when necessary, repentance.
- 2) Like Peter, is there anyone in your life whom you aren't "eating with" (v. 12)? What might be holding you back from interacting with and loving these neighbors, even if they are different? In your journal, write the name down of someone you feel challenged to love better and spend some time in prayer asking Jesus to help you through your prejudices.
- 3) In what ways are you walking in step according to the gospel (v. 14)? In what ways are you struggling? Do you feel motivated to obey by shame or by grace?

QUESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- 1) Today, racial prejudices are just as prevalent as they were during Paul's time. How do you see them in your community? In your school? In your church? How does the gospel convict us in our prejudices, and how does it offer hope? As a family, take time to have a potentially uncomfortable conversation about race, maybe for the first time, and consider how you can work together to combat subconscious biases.
- 2) What does it mean that you are justified by faith alone? Does it mean that you will never sin again? Does it mean that you are free to sin as much as you want?
- 3) In what ways are you walking in step according to the gospel (v. 14)? In what ways are you struggling? Do you feel motivated to obey by shame or by grace? Take time to encourage and pray for one another as a family.