



Confronting Performance Christianity

Topic

Justification

Theme

God justifies people by grace through faith so they might then live by faith in God.

Desired Learner Response

The learner will praise God for justification and put his faith in God for daily Christian growth.

Materials

- Resources 1 and 6

Scripture Focus

Galatians 2:11–21

Summary

When a delegation of Jews arrived in Antioch, Peter withdrew from the Gentile believers. Other saved Jews, following Peter's lead, also withdrew from their Gentile brothers in Christ. Seeing Peter's action as blatant hypocrisy, Paul confronted him. He reminded Peter that justification is by faith, not by law.

Outline

I. The Example of Adding Law to Justification (Gal. 2:11–14)

- A. Peter's practice (2:11, 12)
- B. Peter's poor example (2:13)
- C. Peter's hypocrisy (2:14)

II. The Explanation of Justification by Faith (Gal. 2:15–21)

- A. Paul declared the doctrine (2:15, 16)
- B. Paul answered objections (2:17–20)
 - 1. Objection: Justification makes God a sinner (2:17, 18)
 - 2. Objection: Justification leaves no rule for life (2:19, 20)
- C. Paul pointed to the cross (2:21)

Memory Verse

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

GETTING STARTED

Never Good Enough

ASK: When have you worked for a boss who was never satisfied with your work? (Q1)

ASK: How did you respond? (Q2)

Sometimes we live the Christian life as if God is our boss and He's never satisfied with our performance. That's not the case. Such an outlook on the Christian life brings discouragement and an unhealthy focus and dependence on ourselves.

Paul dealt with Peter who had compromised his beliefs about salvation. In that setting, he explained justification and then went on to teach that the Christian life is not a performance for God but rather a reliance on God. We are saved through faith and we live for God by faith too. Paul's teaching is a good reminder to us that we need God in order to live pleasing to Him.

Ashamed Fan

ASK: When, if ever, have gone to an away game for your favorite sports team?

ASK: Did you wear your team's colors? Why or why not?

Paul confronted Peter for refusing to where his "home colors" when at his rival's "stadium." In other words, Peter acted like a Judaizer after the Judaizers criticized his faith in God. Peter's shortcoming prompted Paul to emphasize that justification comes by faith, not law and that living for Christ comes by faith too.

SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

So far, Paul addressed the Galatian Judaizers by arguing that the gospel of grace does not include keeping the Jewish law. The Jerusalem apostles had confirmed this fact by not compelling Titus, a Gentile, to be circumcised. Second, Paul argued that his authority as an apostle was genuine because Christ had commissioned him as an apostle to the Gentiles. He continued his letter with more arguments that justification is by faith, not law. He used Peter's hypocrisy in Antioch as the setting for his teaching.

I. The Example of Adding Law to Justification (Gal. 2:11–14)

Galatians 2:11–14 reports an incident Luke didn't mention in Acts. Apparently, it took place between Paul and Barnabas's return to Antioch from Jerusalem (Acts 12:25) and their departure from Antioch to begin their first missionary journey (Acts 13:1–4).

Paul confronted Peter for displaying an inconsistent, hypocritical attitude. The rebuke showed once again that Paul was not under the authority of Peter and the

other Jerusalem apostles. He was God's man, and his loyalty to God and His truth demanded that he rebuke Peter.

A. Peter's practice (2:11, 12)

READ: Galatians 2:11, 12.

Peter stayed in Antioch for an unspecified period. He came to know the Gentile believers there and fellowshiped with them at meals, rightfully disregarding Jewish dietary laws. By doing this, he acknowledged the common unity that Jews and Gentiles share in Christ and the freedom both have from the law of Moses. However, when some Jewish believers closely identified with James arrived from Jerusalem, Peter ceased eating with the Gentiles; he "withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision" (2:12).

Peter acted against his convictions when he withdrew from the Gentiles. Earlier, he had defended his ministry to the Gentile Cornelius and had testified that the Holy Spirit had come upon Cornelius and the other Gentiles at Cornelius's home (Acts 10:15–17). And God had specifically addressed dietary laws by allowing Peter to see a vision of animals the Jewish law called unclean. God told Peter to eat from the animals to clearly communicate the Jewish dietary laws specifically and the Mosaic Law in general had already ended. Peter protested, but God said what He had cleansed must not be called unclean (Acts 10:9–16).

READ: Acts 10:9–14. **ASK:** What does Peter's response to God reveal about his understanding of the role of the law in a believer's life? (Q3) *He believed the law was to inform the believer's practice.*

Peter obviously didn't fully understand the transition from living under the law. It was such a deep part of his life, that he couldn't imagine violating the dietary regulations. God made His point three times and Peter seemed to get it. But practicing the new revelation proved difficult.

B. Peter's poor example (2:13)

The church in Antioch included both saved Jews and saved Gentiles. Up until Jews from Jerusalem arrived, the two groups had fellowshiped harmoniously, demonstrating that God's grace and love transcend ethnicity. However, when the saved Jews in the Antioch church saw Peter withdraw from the Gentiles, they, too, broke fellowship with the Gentile brothers in Christ (2:13). Even Barnabas followed Peter's poor example and withdrew from the Gentile believers. This went on for some time before Paul returned to discover the hypocritical practice.

ASK: Put yourself in the place of the Gentiles. How would you like being treated like second class Christians? (Q4)

C. Peter's hypocrisy (2:14)

When Paul realized that Peter's leadership was causing the Jews' separation from the Gentiles, he concluded "that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel" (2:14). He called out their hypocrisy as an insult to the gospel of grace.

Because Peter had offended the gospel and the Gentiles publicly with far-reaching consequences, Paul reproved him publicly. He attacked Peter's hypocrisy forcefully and logically. He pointed out that Peter was a Jew but that as a Christian he lived after the manner of the Gentiles, for he had not trusted in Jewish regulations for salvation. Peter knew full well that nothing about his standing as a Jew affected his salvation. Nevertheless, his behavior did not match his belief. By separating from the Gentiles, Peter essentially communicated that Gentiles had to become Jews to be acceptable to God. His behavior contradicted his Christian belief.

ASK: What might have motivated Peter to practice something that didn't align with his beliefs? (Q5) *He feared people instead of God and loved himself instead of others.*

Paul's confrontation of Peter was spot on. He demonstrated fear of God and love for others. Ignoring the issue instead of confronting it would have helped no one, especially Peter.

II. The Explanation of Justification by Faith (Gal. 2:15–21)

It is hard to determine whether Galatians 2:15–21 quotes part of Paul's reproof to Peter or whether it relates the reasoning that led to the reproof. Either way, it relates to the confrontation in Antioch and forms a transition to Paul's direct words to the Galatians in 3:1. By explaining justification by faith, Paul addressed Peter, the Jewish visitors in Antioch, and the Galatian Judaizers.

A. Paul declared the doctrine (2:15, 16)

READ: Galatians 2:15, 16.

Paul identified Peter, the Jews from Jerusalem, the Galatian Judaizers, and himself as "Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles" (2:15). They had all learned from personal experience that they couldn't be justified by keeping the law. The law led only to frustration because it acted as a mirror to point out sin, but it had no power to give victory over sin. Therefore, the more the Jews tried to live by the law, the more they realized how short they fell of God's righteous standard. The law did not produce life and liberty, but rather death and bondage. Every Jew who tried to keep the law failed. The fact that Paul and the other Jews had put their faith in Christ demonstrated that "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified" (2:16).

READ: Romans 4:5. **ASK:** What does God count for righteousness? (Q6) *Faith in Christ.*

To be justified means to be declared legally righteous by God. When Christ died on the cross for sinners, He bore the penalty for sin. God accepted Christ's substitutionary death and gives Christ's righteousness to all who put their faith in Christ. As such, believers are righteous before God and no longer under His wrath against sin.

ASK: Why would relying on works for salvation insult God? (Q7) *To rely on*

works is to refuse God's gift of salvation, which came through His Son's profound suffering and death.

B. Paul answered objections (2:17–20)

After stating the doctrine of justification, Paul dealt with two objections. Most likely the Jews from Jerusalem used the objections to convince Peter to stop eating meals with the Gentiles. Paul doesn't state the objections directly, but his responses to them inform us of their nature.

1. Objection: Justification makes God a sinner (2:17, 18)

READ: Galatians 2:17.

The Jewish delegation from Jerusalem told Peter he was sinning against God's law by eating with Gentiles. They added that if Peter appealed to the common faith he shared with the Gentiles, then Peter would make God an agent of sin. Peter knew better, but he caved to the pressure and acted as if eating with Gentiles would cause him to sin against God. Peter, unlike Paul, chose to keep the peace rather than stand for truth.

Paul questioned the Jews' argument against eating with Gentiles. "Is therefore Christ the minister of sin?" he asked (Gal. 2:17). In other words, did Christ lead believers into sin as they live out their faith in Him? Paul emphatically answered, "God forbid!" Obviously, living by faith in Christ doesn't cause a person to sin. When Peter ate with the Gentiles, he lived out his freedom from the law and celebrated his new relationship with his fellow believers in Christ.

READ: Galatians 2:18.

By withdrawing from Gentiles, Peter, Barnabas, and others were making the Jewish law a test of Christian fellowship. They were building again the law which had already been destroyed through Christ's death. Furthermore, they were breaking Christ's command to treat Gentiles as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. As mentioned already, God had previously given Peter a dramatic vision about not calling anything unclean that God had cleansed (Acts 10:9–43).

READ: Acts 10:28, 34, 35. **ASK:** What did Peter learn from the vision? (Q8)
That there are no restrictions on interactions between Jews and Gentiles because God accepts both groups without partiality.

The Jews' position that Peter adopted was a throwback to the mistaken belief that a person could be saved by keeping the law. Paul explained that if he, or anyone else, tried to bring back the law as part of justification, then he would make himself a transgressor, or a liar (Gal. 2:18). Paul's gospel never included a throwback to the law.

Paul had built his ministry on principle instead of on personalities. It must have been painful for him to stand against Peter, Barnabas, and other Christian brothers and sisters, but his commitment to truth demanded that he confront Peter for not committing to truth in his practice. Therefore, Paul stood for the truth, even though he had to stand nearly alone.

2. Objection: Justification leaves no rule for life (2:19, 20)

The Jews from Jerusalem also objected that doing away with the law would lead to lawlessness for the law was the Jew's rule for life. Paul addressed the objection by discussing life in Christ.

READ: Galatians 2:19.

Paul used himself as an example of a Jew who came to faith in Christ. As a Jew, he knew that the law had a standard of perfect holiness. But as he lived according to the law, he also realized that the law consistently showed him his sinfulness and guilt before God. As a guilty sinner, Paul stood helpless before God's coming wrath. The law, then, helped him understand that he needed to be saved by God's grace rather than by his own works. In essence, the law pointed beyond itself to God, Who gives spiritual life on the basis of grace through faith.

Paul wrote, "For I through the law am dead to the law" (2:19). The law demanded death for lawbreakers, so Christ died to pay the lawbreaker's death penalty. The law, then, put Jesus to death. But that's not all. All those joined to Christ through faith died with Him on the cross so they "might live unto God" (2:19). Paul explained this idea more fully in verse 20.

READ: Galatians 2:20.

From God's perspective, Paul and all other believers were crucified with Christ because Christ was in them. At salvation, the Holy Spirit places a believer into the body of Christ, creating a union between the believer and Christ (1 Cor. 12:13). That union means all believers share in Christ's death, burial, and resurrection (Rom. 6:1–6).

READ: Romans 6:1–6. **ASK:** Why didn't Paul mention keeping the law in this passage? (Q9) *It has nothing to do with salvation from sin.*

After salvation we experience spiritual power because Christ lives in us. Nevertheless, we are daily subject to temptation. So, we must depend upon the Lord daily for victory over temptation. Paul revealed in Galatians 2:20 that our power and wisdom for living victorious comes by faith in the Son of God.

The Christian life is not about trying to keep a list of rules in order to please God. God wants us to obey Him, but only as we put our faith in Him for wisdom and strength to say no to sin and yes to Him. Furthermore, we obey God because we love Him and want to serve and glorify Him.

Dependence on God, rather than performance for God, is the key to life as a believer. Those who protested the end of the law for the believer couldn't understand the life of faith.

ASK: When has faith in God helped you gain victory over temptation? (Q10)

ASK: When has faith in God helped you to do a great work for Him? (Q11)

C. Paul pointed to the cross (2:21)

Paul concluded by pointing to the cross. He said, "I do not frustrate the grace

of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain” (2:21). The position taken by Peter and by the Judaizers partially rejected God’s grace. When they insisted that Jewish regulations had spiritual merit for salvation, fellowship, or rule of life, they undermined the truth that righteousness is by grace alone.

At the beginning of his letter to the Galatians, Paul declared that Christ “gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world” (1:4). Christ paid the ultimate price because we were dead in sin. However, if righteousness could be achieved by keeping the law, then Christ’s death was unnecessary. Paul’s readers no doubt concluded that those who make keeping the law a condition of salvation treat the cross of Christ with contempt. Their doctrine is false, and believers must reject their teaching.

MAKING IT PERSONAL

Performance-Based Living

The Judaizers wanted to retain a performance element to the Christian life. They couldn’t imagine life without a set of rules to keep and focus on. Believers today can fall into that same mindset.

DISPLAY: Resource 6. **ASK:** What are some characteristics of a performance-based approach to living for Christ? (Q12) (Record or reveal answers.) *Emphasis on outward actions, dependence on self, pride, desire to hear praise, competitive attitude.*

Faith-Based Living

Paul explained that life should be lived by faith in Christ. He lives in us and helps us live pleasing to Him so His name might be glorified.

DISPLAY: Resource 6. **ASK:** What are characteristics of a faith-based approach to living for Christ? (Q13) (Record or reveal answers.) *Emphasis on heart attitudes, dependence on the Spirit, humility, praise to God, cooperative and supportive attitude.*

ASK: Which of the two approaches to life describes your life? (Q14)

ASK: What steps could we take to living by faith rather than putting on a performance? (Q15) *Pray about your service to God; ask God for strength and wisdom; make a habit of praising God; be thankful to others for their service to God.*

Summary and Memory Verse

Use resource 1 to record a summary for this lesson: Live for and serve God by faith in Him.

Encourage your learners to memorize Galatians 2:20. Give them an opportunity to say the verse in class next week.

