

*What is in view*

This section of Galatians is rich with memorable phrases and well-rehearsed passages. But we will bring the focus on the heart of Paul's Gospel message: Jesus justifies us.

*What is helpful to note*

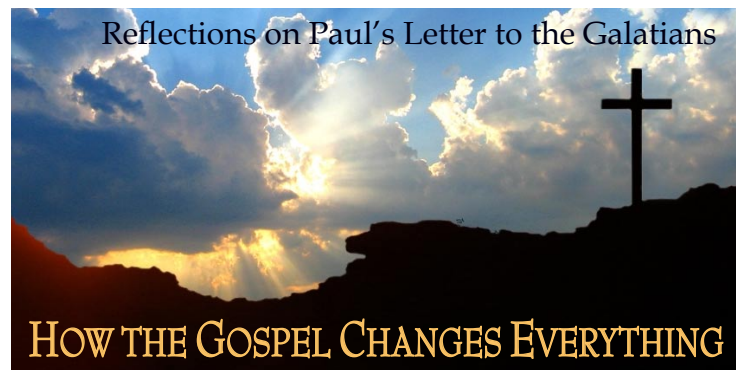
As you read through this passage, there are likely to be questions about a number of things. Some of those you might want to address in your group; some may not be worth devoting much time to. Not that the ideas aren't important, but some of the "wading" might be more of a challenge than you can get through in an evening. Keep in mind that the goal is to grasp justification.

To help you understand the passage, let's touch on a couple of key thoughts.

2:15: In referring to the Gentiles as "sinners," Paul is not suggesting that Jews don't sin. He is using the common language that any "good Jew" would use. The Jews were the "Law keepers" and the Gentiles "sinners."

2:16: This is the heart of the section. What needs to be understood here is what *justification* really means. You may have heard the pop definition of justification as "Just as if I never sinned." But that falls short of the real meaning. That makes *forgiveness* and *justification* identical. But justification is much more than that. Forgiveness (part of what is ours in the work of Christ) is the cancelling of the debt we owe for our sins; but that doesn't give us any *positive holy standing* in God's eyes. Forgiveness, in a sense, only brings us back to "zero point." Justification is God accounting to us the full righteousness of Christ through what He has done

*"Paul is pointing to the truth that sinners can do nothing for their salvation but must put their trust in Christ. . . . Nothing the worshipper could do could bring salvation. That came as a free gift from God or it did not come at all."*  
Leon Morris



on our behalf as we come to trust in Him through faith. Justification is "Just as if I have always lived like Jesus."

2:17: For Jews, to come to recognize that they were no different than the Gentiles, means they, too, are "sinners." But this doesn't mean Christ "ministers" sin; He is the cure!

2:18-19: The only real "offense" (the idea of being a "transgressor" is to "offend by crossing the limit") is to rebuild what has been destroyed. What is rebuilt? A rule based approach to holiness that is destroyed in the cross.

2:20: This is not a call to "try harder" to "be crucified" and so live holy. This is a proclamation of what Jesus has, in fact, done for us. We have died to the old way of life and He is now in the center of our souls as the new source of life. We don't live by "rules" but by faith in Him.

2:21: Any other approach, anything that suggests we must "do something" to stand holy before God ultimately is a rejection of grace and a declaration that the cross is, functionally, useless.

*What to talk about with your group*

Although we don't want to predicate our relationship with God on how we carry out human relationships, there are some parallels. By beginning the discussion on the dynamic of forgiveness, we can open the door for understanding justification.

With forgiveness, we feel we are given a "clean slate." But that doesn't mean the relationship is "positively wonderful!" All it means is that the black marks are gone. And, many Christians seem to live in relationship with God as if forgiveness is all they have received.

It is true that Christ, through His death and resurrection, provide our forgiveness. But more. As we see here in Galatians, through faith in Christ we are "justified." As discussed above (and in the Chapell quote in the margin), we recognize the powerful and wonderful dimension that justification adds to our relationship with God.

Those who live rule-based seem to stop short of justification—they may recognize that Jesus forgives them, but then they feel the need to "work at" creating positive holy standing before God by their efforts. But Paul makes it clear that all such efforts undermine grace and declare that the cross was, functionally, a useless act.

*"This means that, even as I realize that the identity I tried to establish by obedience to the Law is dead, the life Jesus lived to fulfill the Law is mine. I gain the benefits of His being, His reputation, His standing with God, and the credit for His righteousness."*  
Bryan Chapell

## Questions for Reflection and for Group Discussion

## Thinking . . .

When you have “done someone wrong” and they forgive you, where does that leave you in relationship to them? What do you feel must happen for the relationship to continue?

## Reflecting . . .

Think back over what Paul has been telling us about the Gospel. How would you summarize what that “Good News” of what Jesus did is all about?

As Paul moves forward in his defense of the truth, he comes to some powerful statements about the Gospel. Read Galatians 2:15-21.

At the heart of this section is Paul’s introduction of the word “justification.” The word means “to declare to be righteous or holy.” How does this differ from forgiveness?

If those who believe in Jesus were not “justified” in God’s eyes but simply forgiven, where would that leave them?

Why would misunderstanding justification contribute to a “rules based” approach to Christian living?

## Responding . . .

What changes in how you relate to God if you live in “justification” instead of simply “forgiveness”?

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## Reflections on Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

