

Galatians 2:14-21 Dig Deeper for personal reading and Life Groups...

Gal 2:15-21 God's gospel of freedom...defended

**We are put right with God
by relying on Jesus' work
not by relying on our work**

**"JUSTIFICATION
BY FAITH
ALONE"**



1) A non-negotiable truth (v15-16)

2) An honourable truth (v17-19)

3) A permanent truth (v20-21)

TURN YOUR EYES UPON JESUS!

We come today to a study on one of the most important passages in Galatians and for the first time Paul mentions the j-word: "justification". (Though not the J-word Jesus!). While this concept sounds complex or academic, it is actually straightforward, practical, and lifegiving.

1. With or without looking at Charlie's powerpoint above, how would you explain "Justification by Faith alone" (v16) to someone who doesn't come to church? It has been described as the "doctrine on which the church stands or falls". Do you agree?
2. What difference do you think it would make to your life if you really grasped more fully that you are accepted not on the basis of what you do?
3. Why do you think the Galatians might have thought that Paul's gospel was making Christ a servant (ESV) or minister (KJV) of sin (v17)? Have you come across this in your interactions with others? How can you respond?
4. In what way has the believer died and risen with Christ (v19-21)? What does that mean and what implications are there for us? (You might like to look at the bullet points at the end of the first article below).
5. Charlie said that this should cause us to dance in the aisles. Spend some extra time thanking God for it, and maybe consider memorising Gal 2:20.

Some resources....

- **Verse 18 is tricky.** Turn over the page for a few options.
- **The Doctrine of Justification** simply explained by Philip Eveson at <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/the-doctrine-of-justification/>
- **Justification and the Reformation.** Click here for an article that tells you more about Justification by Faith, Luther, the reformation and the 16th Century split from Catholicism. <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/essay/justification-and-the-protestant-reformation/>
- **Book: The Glories of God's Love (A Gospel Primer) – Milton Vincent.** Pick up your free copy of this short and encouraging book and testimony from Charlie.
- For something different, **a rap on Justification by Shai Linne:** https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XID_mQMdynM

For those who are stuck on verse 18... (and don't worry if you aren't!)

¹⁷ "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ **If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.** ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God".

These verses are tricky, esp v18. "The passage in 2v17-19 is not easy to interpret" (R. Alan Cole-Tyndale Commentary). "These verses are not easy and have been differently understood" (John Stott- BST Commentary).

It turns on what is the thing (which I will call "the wall") that Paul is referring to in v18 which is being rebuilt, and who is rebuilding it. There are 3 main options that I can see- you may think of others. Most commentators end up in understanding it to be some version of no3:

1) The wall is fallen humanity and Christ is rebuilding it.

The argument would be: Jesus isn't promoting sin, he's working against it, he's rebuilding salvation. However there's no sense in which it's being rebuilt, only built and the subject of the verb is Paul. This interpretation needs you to read the "I" as Paul putting himself in Jesus' shoes which isn't the most natural way to read it.

2) The wall is sin and the Christian in general is being shown to be a lawbreaker.

If in the process of being justified in Christ (v17) we discover that we are sinners (v17) then the process of justification by faith has shown us to be law breakers, and so the person who comes to Christ by definition is shown to be a lawbreaker. "If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law-breaker" (NIV84). However it doesn't make so much sense of dying to the law in verse 19.

3) The wall is justification by works of the law and Paul is theoretically rebuilding it.

Paul is warning his readers not to go back to justification by works of the law (v16) and he's saying, "if I were to do that, if I were to follow Peter's lead and go back to the whole Pharisaical project that I left behind on the Damascus road, I would be completely wrong. And by rebuilding the wall of justification by works that I left behind, I would therefore prove that I am a transgressor, because I would be using the whole law wrongly and therefore being a transgressor of it by abusing the whole system".

I'm still trying to get my head round the possibilities (come back to me if you can think of other options) but I think something like the last one is the most likely, and most commentators go for some version of 3. That is where I landed in the sermon is:

"It's not Jesus, and those who rely on Jesus who are the promoters of sin, actually it is those who rely on their own obedience of the law who are the transgressors, the real sinners. If I rebuild what I tore down- [that's the edifice of law keeping that I left behind on the Damascus Road when I put my trust in Jesus as my righteousness]- If I go back to law keeping as the way of getting right with God, I prove myself- the law truster to be the real breaker of the law- the real transgressor".

But don't let a tricky verse discourage you if you don't understand it, or tempt you into "justification by cleverness" if you think you do! Have fun prayerfully thinking about it.