

DISCUSSION FOCUS

Read (Primary Text): Galatians 2:15–21

Supporting Texts: Matt 5:17–20; Galatians 3:1–26; Eph 2:8–10; 4:17–24; Heb 9:15–28; Jer 31:31–34; James 2:10, 20–24

MAIN IDEA: We are not justified by being a good person but by faith in Christ Who died in our place.

OBSERVE

Looking at the context of Gal 2:11–14, what does Paul mean by “we are Jews and not ‘Gentile sinners’” in v. 15? *Paul has just described how he had to rebuke Peter for his hypocrisy in living free from the law around Gentiles (non-Jews) but adhering to dietary restrictions and other laws when he was around Jews. Paul is being sarcastic when he says this in v. 15 because this is the attitude of a devout Jew against Gentiles.*

What does Paul mean by his profound statement in v. 21? *If someone could be righteous before God because they were able to keep the law, then God sending Jesus to die on the cross was for absolutely nothing. In other words, there would be no need for Jesus to absorb the wrath of God in our place if the law could save. The reality is one sin leaves us condemned (James 2:10) apart from the intervention of the cross.*

INTERPRET

Paul emphasizes that a person is justified by faith (v. 16) rather than works and goes on to indicate that even Abraham was justified by faith (Gal 3:6–9) yet James seems to use Abraham as an example of justification by works (James 2:20–24). How do these two statements support one another? *In Galatians, Paul was addressing those who would add to the gospel (Jesus + works = salvation). In James, James is addressing those who would claim to have faith but have no respect for the law and live lives of hypocrisy (Faith + do whatever you want = salvation). In reality, Paul and James are looking at two sides of the same coin. Salvation is grace through faith which produces good works (Eph 2:8–10). Works are not the means to salvation but are a necessary result of salvation.*

So what was the purpose of the law and does it apply today (Gal 2:17–20)? *The purpose of the law was to make clear God’s standard and to show how far we are from it. It demonstrates the need for a Savior Who could fulfill it perfectly and die the death we deserved for our sins against God (Gal 3:19–26). Jesus fulfilled the law perfectly on our behalf (Matt 5:17–20) but it still demonstrates God’s moral and ethical standards. The ceremonial laws are fulfilled in Christ, our Great High Priest (Heb 9:15–28; Jer 31:31–34). Indeed both Jewish and Gentile believers are Abraham’s children through Christ.*

RESPOND

What does this passage say about our efforts to earn God’s favor by being a good person? *It is impossible to earn God’s favor and none of us are good apart from God. Only through saving faith in Jesus and His work on the cross can we be declared righteous before God. From this starting point, we can live in obedience to Him.*

APPLY

How can we live “crucified with Christ” (v. 20)? *Our sins were nailed to the cross and our fallen selves have been crucified, dead, and buried with Christ. Our new selves (Eph 4:17–24) have been raised to walk in obedience to Him. We have no excuse for living like the world anymore. Our lives should point others to the source of our transformation: Christ alone.*