

# **GALATIANS: THE ONE TRUE GOSPEL**



## **WEEK 8 JUSTIFIED BY FAITH: LAYING DOWN THE LAW GALATIANS 2:15-16**

Van Nuys Bible Study  
Doulos Fellowship Group  
Grace Community Church

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2014

## Galatians 2:15-16 – Justified By Faith

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### The Text

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We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;  
yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law  
but through faith in Jesus Christ,  
so we also have believed in Christ Jesus,  
in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law,  
because by works of the law no one will be justified.

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### Introduction

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- Paul is enraged by the Judaizers' infiltration of the Galatian churches.
  - He has reminded the churches of his apostolic authority.
  - He has also supported his claim that the gospel he preaches is God's gospel.
  - As he finishes up his "I had to rebuke Peter" story, the time has come to state the heart of the one true gospel itself...
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### Principal Proposition

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Salvation is only through faith in Jesus Christ and not obedience to the law.

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### Literary Context

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- A. Paul's Gospel is God's Gospel (1:11-2:21)
  - 1. Revelation from God (1:11-12)
  - 2. Support for Paul's Claim (1:13-2:21)
    - a. His Pre-Converted Life (1:13-14)
    - b. His Conversion (1:15-17)
    - c. His Obscurity (1:18-24)
    - d. His Approval by the Jerusalem Apostles (2:1-10)
    - e. His Authority in the Rebuke of Peter (2:11-21)
      - 1) Paul's Confrontation of Peter (2:11-13)
      - 2) **Paul's Correction of Peter (2:14-21)**

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## Literary Structure

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Jews by Birth (v. 15)

Justification by Faith (v. 16)

1) Generally, 2) Personally, 3) Universally

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## Interpretive Comments

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### Jews by Birth

v. 15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

➤ “We ourselves are Jews by birth”

- “We ourselves” is a continuation of Paul’s encounter with Peter in verses 11-14.
- As life-long Jews, they knew firsthand what it meant to live under the weight of religious rules and regulations.
- The KJV and NASB translations say “Jews by nature.” Because they were born as Jews, they were members of God’s covenant people and recipients of His covenant promises.



➤ “and not Gentile sinners”

- If the original recipients of the law could not be saved by it, the Gentiles most certainly could not be.
- Paul is not saying that he is not a sinner or that Gentiles are worse. Rather, he is reminding Peter of the privileges they have in being a part of Israel. Their history, heritage, and understanding of God is deeper than the average Gentile Joe.

## Justification by Faith

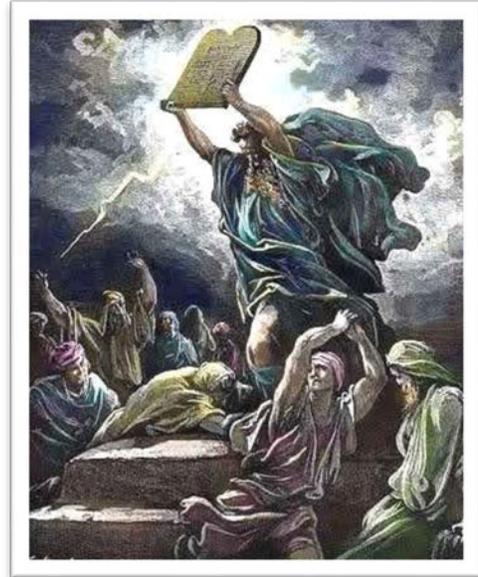
v. 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

➤ “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law”

- Paul proclaims that salvation is only through faith in Christ and not by the law three times in this verse. This first instance is general: “a person is...”
- The word “justify” (δικαιόω) appears eight times in Galatians. Three of those occurrences are found in this verse. The verb is also frequently found in Romans (15x).
- The New Testament words “righteousness,” “righteous,” “justify,” and “justification” are all from the same Greek root and have similar meanings.
- Justification is God’s act of pardoning sinners and receiving them as righteous. He pardons us for the sake of Christ, not for obeying the law.

*If we could be righteous before God based on our works, then Christ died for nothing. The law would be sufficient in teaching us how to live to be saved.  
(Schreiner)*

- The phrase “works of the law” appears eight times in Paul’s letters (Romans 3:20, 28; Galatians 2:16 [3x]; 3:2, 5, 10).
- This phrase has been (and continues to be) the subject of much debate. It can easily be translated, “works produced by the law” and is often interpreted to mean one of the following:



- 1) Legalism (human effort to earn righteousness)
- 2) Social distinctions of the law (circumcision, dietary restrictions, the Sabbath)
- 3) Deeds commanded by the law (all the works of the law itself)

- Number 2 is a modern view (from the “New Perspective on Paul” camp of scholarship) and should be rejected. Augustine limited “works of the law” to ritual/ceremonial law, but little historical support exists for this interpretation. Also, Paul emphasizes the obligation to do ALL that the law requires in Galatians 3:10, not part of it. The whole law appears again in Galatians 5:3.
- Does the phrase “works of the law” refer to blanket legalism? Or deeds that were commanded by the law?”

➤ “but through faith in Jesus Christ”

- Just as we are not justified by obeying the law, we are justified by our faith in Jesus Christ. Paul unpacks this truth in Romans 3:19-26.
- Concerning justification by faith, Martin Luther is often quoted for saying that this is “the article by which the church stands or falls.” Although, he never actually said that... he came close a number of times and certainly expressed the same thought a number of different ways.
- John Calvin said justification by faith is the “main hinge upon which all religion turns” in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.
- Thomas Cranmer (1489-1556) famously articulated what every great reformer was thinking at the time. He said, “This faith the Holy Scripture teacheth; this is the strong rock and foundation of Christian religion; this doctrine advanceth and setteth forth the true glory of Christ, and suppresseth the vain-glory of man; whosoever denieth this is not to be reputed for a true Christian man, nor for a setter-forth of Christ’s glory, but for an adversary of Christ and his gospel, and for a setter-forth of men’s vain-glory.” In other words, those who deny this doctrine are not true Christians, but true enemies of Christ.
- Anything else is simply not the gospel.

➤ “so we also have believed in Christ Jesus”

- This is the second time Paul proclaims that salvation is only through faith in Christ and not by the law. Here the statement is personal: “we also...”
- There is no distinction between “faith” and “belief” here. The same verb (πιστευω) is used for both and appears three times in this verse. It means “to trust” or “to rely upon.”



- Paul is reminding Peter that they too have placed their trust in Christ and not the works of the law, because he needed the reminder.

➤ “in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law”

- In case you missed it... salvation comes through faith in Christ and not by obeying the law.
- Why is keeping the law not enough to save us?

➤ “because by works of the law no one will be justified”

- This is the third time Paul proclaims that salvation is only through faith in Christ and not by the law. Here the statement is universal: “no one will...”
- Can a person believe they are earning their way to heaven by obeying the requirements of the old law and still get there?

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## Discussion Questions

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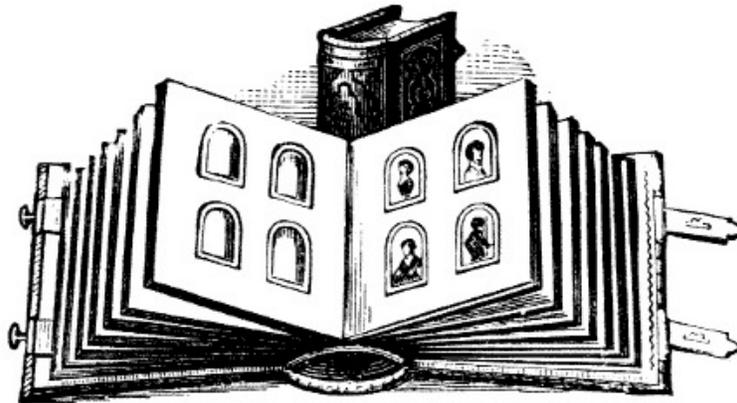
- Does the phrase “works of the law” refer to blanket legalism? Or deeds that were commanded by the law? (pg. 5)
- Why is keeping the law not enough to save us? (pg. 6)
- Can a person believe they are earning their way to heaven by obeying the requirements of the old law and still get there? (pg. 6)

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## Concise Prayers

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- Lord, thank you for saving sinners, both Jews and Gentiles. (v. 15)
- May the truth of your glorious gospel be more than an affirmation of our understanding of it. Force it into our mouths and let it sink deep into our bloodstreams. We pray that our lives would be shaped and steered by the reality this glorious doctrine points to. You are both just and the justifier. We cannot save ourselves, but acknowledge that we are miserable, poor, and weak. It is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that we are declared righteous. (v. 16)



Hoping to show it to Jesus when he gets to heaven, Rev. Williams collects photographs of all the people he has baptized in his special "album o' works."

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