



THE LOOKOUT

AUGUST 2021

Unit: GALATIANS Theme: CHOOSE

Overview: Galatians has been called the Magna Carta of Christian freedom. In it, Paul defines the gospel in terms of liberation. If it feels like a straitjacket, it probably is not the gospel. One man said, “Since I became a Christian, I do anything I want to—the only difference is that Jesus changed all my want-tos.” This liberating gospel contains the righteousness found only in Christ, which is sufficient for living by the Spirit.

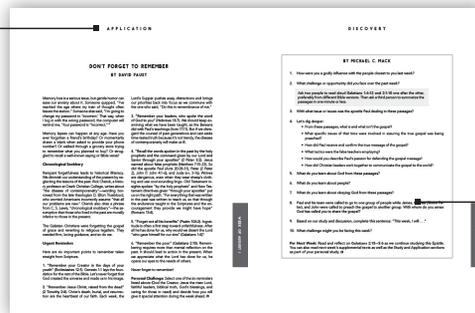
HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.



Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.



Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF AUGUST 8, 2021

LESSON AIM: Choose the righteousness that is gained through faith in Christ, because it cannot be achieved any other way.

UNIT: Galatians

THEME: Choose

LESSON TEXT: Galatians 2:15–3:6

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Galatians 3:7-14; Romans 1:16-17; 3:21-26; 8:1-4

WHICH RIGHTEOUSNESS?

BY MARK SCOTT

What could be more important than being in a right relationship with one's God? All world religions strive to articulate how that can be achieved. Islam has its five pillars. Buddhism strives for Nirvana. Hinduism reads through the Vedas with the goal of advancing to different levels of reincarnation. Native American spirituality attempts to become one with the earth. (These are all overgeneralizations.) The gospel claims that being right with God comes through the righteousness of Christ. This righteousness has a God side to it (i.e., the faithfulness of Jesus) and a human side to it (i.e., faith in Jesus).

Having called the Galatians back to the true gospel (1:6-10), having defended his own apostleship in that gospel (1:11-2:10), and having confronted Peter (i.e., Cephas) when he failed to act in conjunction with that gospel (2:11-15), Paul begins to argue for the gospel of righteousness.

Righteousness is probably the third most famous quality of God (following his love and holiness). The terms *right*, *righteous*, *righteousness*, *just*, *justify*, *justifier*, and *justification* are all translated from one basic family of words. That family of words originally had a legal context to them; they come from the court. A judge can decide if a person is righteous in the eyes of the law. In the case of the true gospel, God plays the role of both the one who is just and the one who justifies (Romans 3:26). His law and mercy are in tension, play, and union in making someone righteous.

The Thesis of Which Righteousness*Galatians 2:15-21*

In many ways the thesis of the Epistle to the Galatians is in this paragraph. Paul stated the thesis in these verses, and then in Galatians 3-4 he made several arguments for that thesis. How can Jews and Gentiles be righteous before God? The answer is, "The same way." Jews have an advantage *by birth* (not being *sinful Gentiles*), but both must be righteous the same way.

Verse 16 might be one of the most wonderfully redundant verses in the Bible. Three times in one verse Paul reminded the Galatians they were not right with God by *works of the law*. No one can obey the law that specifically or completely. Being justified comes through *faith in Jesus Christ*. A person must trust in the complete atoning work of Christ on the cross to be righteous.

In verses 17-18, Paul anticipated what critics of his thesis might say. They figured that if righteousness came from faith in Christ, then that would open the door for sinning without restraint (cf. Romans 6:1-4). In a twisted sort of way, Paul's opponents would argue, this means that Christ *promotes* (is a servant of) *sin*. To this, Paul gave an unqualified no (*Absolutely not!*). If Paul were promoting this, he would be destroying his whole righteousness system and end up breaking the law.

The law was fulfilled in Jesus in the same way an apple fulfills itself from the apple blossom (Matthew 5:17; Romans 10:4). The apple blossom must die for the apple to live. Paul's sin died through the law so he *might live for God*. This new life is viewed in terms of being in union with Christ. If verse 16 is the clearest statement of the thesis, then verse 20 is its loftiest expression. Spiritually speaking, Christians died to their sins and their old way of life when Jesus died on the cross. Christian living is just gratitude for this grace. Believers live by faith in Christ. Any other way of living would be to *set aside* (nullify or abolish) *the grace of God* and strive for one's own righteousness.

The First Argument of that Thesis*Galatians 3:1-6*

With fiery logic and the passion of a courtroom lawyer, Paul argued for this righteousness. The first argument had to do with the Holy Spirit. Paul's put-down was strong: "*You foolish Galatians.*" He followed this with a harsh question: "*Who has bewitched (cast an evil eye or spell on) you?*" The Galatians saw Jesus crucified through the preaching of Paul.

But more to the point, the Galatians did not receive the Holy Spirit because they obeyed the law. They received the Spirit (and all the attending miraculous aspects of his work) through faith in Christ. One cannot start with the Spirit and then add the flesh (i.e., the fleshliness of living by the law) and think that one is making progress. That would be ludicrous.

In Romans and Galatians, the spotlight shined on Abraham. Paul leaned into him to transition to his next argument. The famous Genesis 15:6 was invoked. Abraham *believed God*. That got *credited* (reckoned or counted) *as righteousness*. On the Day of Judgment, we will want the righteousness that comes from faith in Christ—not our own. ■

APPLICATION

CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

BY DAVID FAUST

It's possible to study the Bible the way a hiker enjoys mountain scenery. Look at the big picture. Read straight through several chapters and try to take it all in. Ponder the panorama of God's redemption story.

We also can study the Bible the way a scientist uses a microscope. Pay attention to the details. Look closely at every sentence. See what you can learn by examining a single word or meditating on a short phrase like "justified by faith" (Galatians 2:16).

Astonishing Truth

A biblical text normally has a single meaning, but it can have many applications. Consider these memorable words from the apostle Paul: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me" (Galatians 2:20). This one astonishing verse compels us to think about

- what happened at the cross ("I have been crucified with Christ"),
- the work of the Holy Spirit ("Christ lives in me"),
- what it means to be saved by grace ("I live by faith"), and
- the depth of God's love for the individual ("the Son of God . . . loved me and gave himself for me").

According to a commentary by William Barclay, the apostle Paul "had tried the way of the law; he had tried with all the terrible intensity of his hot heart to put himself right with God by a life that sought to obey every single item of that law." But this approach led to frustration, for the more Paul tried to keep God's law, the more he realized his own imperfection and helplessness. When Paul finally cast himself on the mercy of God, Barclay says, "So great was the change that the

only way he could describe it was to say that he had been crucified with Christ so that the man he used to be was dead and the living power within him now was Christ himself."

Making It Personal

How does Galatians 2:20 apply to us? Here are three ideas that come to mind.

My sins were nailed to the cross. A classic gospel song asks, "Were you there when they crucified my Lord?" Yes, I was. He carried all of my mischief and mistakes, recklessness and rebellion in his body on the cross (1 Peter 2:24). He paid a price too steep for me to afford to give me a gift I could never earn. I was crucified with Christ.

My ego was nailed to the cross. That word, ego, literally appears in the original text of Galatians 2:20. Paul insists that his ego (Greek for "I" or "self") no longer lives. In baptism, the old sinful self dies and we rise to new life (Romans 6:1-4). Instead of striving for recognition and approval, our goal should be to shine the spotlight on Christ.

My death was nailed to the cross. "He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies" (Romans 8:11). We don't need to fear death when the crucified and risen Christ lives in us.

Whether we take a big-picture view of the Bible or focus on the microscopic details, let's cultivate a vibrant relationship with the Lord. Then, like the apostle Paul, we can say with confidence, "I live by faith in the Son of God."

Personal Challenge: In your personal journal or on a piece of paper, copy down the words of Galatians 2:20 in your own handwriting. After prayerful reflection, write a few sentences expressing how you will apply this verse in your life. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. With whom did you share the gospel last week?
2. What challenge did you face over the past week?

Ask two people to read aloud **Galatians 2:15–3:6** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to briefly summarize the passage.

3. What sets of contrasts do you see in this passage?
4. Let's dig deeper:
 - What are we justified by and not justified by?
 - How does Paul respond to those who say God's grace promotes more sin?
 - What does it look like in the average day of a Christ follower for Christ to live in them?
 - Using this passage, how would you explain to someone who is not a Christian how they can be right with God?
 - How would you explain how one receives the Holy Spirit?
 - How would you explain how one continues to live (finishes) as a Christian?
 - How would you explain how one can experience God's miracles in their life?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. What do you learn about obeying God from this passage?
8. From this passage alone, develop a simple plan for presenting the gospel to someone. (*You may want to take time during the meeting for each person to write out their plan. Then have each person take a minute or two to read it aloud.*) With whom will you share this in the coming week?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. What new opportunities do you expect this week?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Galatians 3:23–4:10**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖