



## STUDY GUIDE & DAILY READINGS

Sunday, February 28, 2010

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### MythBusters

*Myth: Christians are Morally Superior (Week 1 of 3)*

**Galatians 2:14-21** — *The Word from the Bible (TNIV)*

*When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"*

*"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

*"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! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.*

*"For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 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. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"*

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#### **Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia**

Galatians is Paul's great declaration of religious freedom — a freedom that involves independence from the demands of religion and dependence on God. This letter to the churches of Galatia is characteristic of the tension in Paul's theology between the demands of the law and the new life of loving others out of love for Christ.

The theme of this letter is grace — God's grace alone by which we are saved. By grace, God frees us from the law, liberates us from legalism and the rigidity of rules, and gives us a Spirit-filled life of joy, meaning and ministry. Accepting Christ by faith, we are not only justified, we become new beings in Christ. We enter a new realm of power — the Spirit. Christ lives in us. Our lives reflect Christ's life as Christ is "formed" in us. We produce the fruit of the Spirit, which is the expression of Christ in us.

The letter is set in the context of conflict and controversy. The Christian Jews want the non-Jewish converts to conform to the law and ceremony of the Jewish traditions. Paul claims that a relationship with God does not rest on right ceremony or even living a right life, but instead on living a daily life with Christ. Paul makes no attempt to hide his passion for the Gospel of Christ. His words are intense and sometime insulting to the Galatians that have succumbed to pressure to conform. The intensity and clarity of it is captured in Paul's closing words. He has been dictating his letter to a scribe. But as he closes his letter in chapter six, as though he does not trust anyone to put it as plainly as he wants it to be, or to make sure that no one will mistake that this is the most powerful conviction of his life, he takes the pen and writes boldly: **"For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything, but a new creation."** (6:15)

The church is always in need of hearing the message of Galatians. No matter what we have experienced, it is our nature to continue to fall into a system of merit, and to think in terms of achievement and reward. We want to earn our way — to set a system in place and justify our actions. Paul expresses the life-transforming, world-changing affirmation of justification by grace through faith. We are at the mercy of God's grace, and that mercy encompasses all our sins.

## ***In Christ***

The closing verses of the first chapter provide a key to understanding Paul's total commitment to the centrality of Christ. The phrase, "in Christ," is the key to all Paul's beliefs. Everything is secondary to this position. Whether it be an individual, a group of Christians, or a church, the relationship with Christ is fundamental to everything. When we are in Christ, our lives become more than just the existence of another day. We are spiritual beings existing in a physical world. Everything changes. For the church, we function as the body of Christ, a divine institution against which the gates of hell cannot prevail.

We, like Paul, are to stand as Christ before others, to become as Christ to others in order that they might see in us what the Christ way is. In that sense, every Christian is to be as Christ. To the degree that we are as Christ, to that degree, God can be glorified in us.

Law and ceremony as a basis for right relationship with God is futile and must be abandoned once and for all (Gal. 2:14-19). Only through faith in Christ Jesus are we justified. Paul had learned this through his own bitter defeat as well as from his observation of others (Romans 1:16-2:29; 7:4-25). This does not mean that the law and ceremony are of no value, for they can guide our actions and draw us closer to God. But they alone can not make us "right" with God.

The heart of the Gospel and Paul's expression of it is in verse 16: ***A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. It is this faith in Christ that drives us in our relationships with others. "In Christ," we can do no other than to love as Christ has loved us.***

In the following verses (2:16-21), Paul spells out his formula for the way we should live each day. The climax of these first two chapters comes with these words, ***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.***

### ***There are three key words in this passage: law, justification, and faith.***

***Law.*** The object of obedience was to justify oneself in relation to God in order to be accepted by God. The anguishing turmoil running through Israel's effort at salvation confirms Paul's experience that no effort on the part of persons is ever adequate to make one righteous before God. Psalm 143 gives expression to this anguish: "Hear my prayer, O Lord; give ear to my supplications! In thy faithfulness answer me, in thy righteousness! Enter not into judgment with thy servant; for no man living is righteous before thee" (Psalm 143:1-2, RSV).

Instead of focusing on loving and serving others, these self-righteous law-oriented Christians were focusing on the nuances of the law – justifying themselves. Paul is willing to throw all that away for one purpose – love. In Paul there was no place for moral superiority, but only the acceptance of others through Christ Jesus.

***Justification.*** In the Greek language, the word for "justified" was a metaphor from a court of law. The Greek for this comes from a root word meaning "point out" or "show." To be "right" or "justified" is to conform to a standard of acceptable character or conduct. The state or quality of this conformity is "righteousness" (rightness), or "justice."

In modern speech, we don't use "righteousness" and "justice" in the same fashion. We say a person is seeking to justify himself by making excuse for what he has done or said. But we also use justify to describe the act of making right, similar to "justifying" margins in a written document. For Paul, to justify is to make right, not to make just or fair or equitable.

This is the core of Paul's experience and teaching. It is God who justifies. No law can force our unruly nature to comply with God's norm. We cannot understand Paul, nor can we participate fully in the Christian experience, until we grasp the fact that to be justified means that as sinners we are "acquitted," "accepted," "set right with God," and "saved" despite our sin.

What a strange turn of mind in the Jewish system — a God who justifies the ungodly, not the godly! If God justified the godly, we could calculate and even control our justification, because we would have an achievement-reward system. Such a system can be manipulated, so justification would really be in our hands. Paul says this can't be so: ***"A man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ"*** (verse 16).

***Faith.*** The third key word in this passage is faith. The primary meaning of faith for Paul is trust, and thus not a passive, grateful reception of God's mercy, but rather an active change and participation in the work of Christ in this world. Trust is the best understanding of faith because it is both a verb and a noun. We have trust; we also can trust someone. Faith as a word does not have a verb form. We can't say "I faith him." We are justified by faith — trust — in Jesus Christ. As such, we trust our lives and actions to the Christ that now lives in us.

Jesus provided us the best illustration of faith which is basically trust. ***Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.*** (Mark 10:15). Healthy children trust their mother or father without worry or concern and trust their care.

This radical faith (entrusting ourselves to Christ for salvation) saves us from two great pitfalls: one, the pitfall of trying to earn favor with God; and two, the temptation to compare our moral and spiritual achievement with others in order that we may be seen in a different light.

### ***Are we morally superior?***

Paul's answer to this question would be a resounding NO! But does this mean that as Christians, we can do whatever we please? Once again the answer is NO! To live in Christ means claiming these three words in both identity and action: pardon, power and partnership.

To be in Christ brings **pardon**. This pardon means forgiveness from past sin, freedom from the law, but also a passionate urge never to sin again (Rom. 4:24-25; II Cor. 5:14-15; Col. 2:12-15, 20, 3:1-4).

To be in Christ brings **power**. This power comes as we yield to Christ. We become dominated by "the mind of Christ" — this is our power (II Cor. 10:3-6; Rom. 6:1-11). We do not live out of our own resources, but we live out of the resources that God provides as Christ lives in us. To understand Christ's power is to become a spiritual being existing in a physical world.

To be in Christ brings **partnership**. Our life ceases to be our own. It now belongs to Christ. This spiritual partnership is different than any human partnership. God — through Christ — blesses us with meaning and joy beyond our expectation. The more we offer, the more we receive (see also Phil. 3:10, Rom. 8:17; Col. 1:24-25).

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## **Prayer Focus**

Trietsch is a praying church. This morning, as you worship, one of our prayer volunteers is praying for everyone in each section of our worship center. We believe that prayer changes lives and hearts for good and for God.

We invite you to join these volunteers by praying for those persons around you. We believe these prayers will have an immediate impact on those for whom you are praying.

***Remember... someone is praying for you. Have a great week!***

***Next week we continue the sermon series on the book of Galatians, called "MythBusters."  
Come learn Paul's lessons on what Christianity is really all about.***

***Invite someone to worship this week. You will be glad you did.  
God is doing great things through the ministry of Trietsch.***

# Daily Readings

Each of these passages focus on God's promise of forgiveness and justification through Jesus Christ. Hopefully these readings and reflective questions will prepare you for the sermons. The study guide readings allow us to dig deeper.

**Monday, March 1 – Read John 3** — This is a wonderful passage about Jesus' conversation with Jewish leader named Nicodemus. Included in this discussion is the most quoted passage in scripture. ***“For God so loved the world, that God gave God's only Son, that whosoever believes in Him will not perish, but have eternal life.”*** Memorize John 3:16, if you haven't already. If you were hearing this for the first time, what would be your response? What does this passage mean to you?

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**Tuesday, March 2 – Read Romans 5:1-11** — ***“For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly.”*** (Romans 5:6) Memorize this passage. Did you know that Christ died for you before you even knew the name Jesus? What have you done this week for Christ? Who have you loved? Would you be willing to died for someone that did not even know your name?

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**Wednesday, March 3 – Read 2:1-9** — ***“For by grace you have been saved through grace, it is not any of your own doing, but a gift from God.”*** Memorize this passage. Have you done something that you think unforgivable? Is there someone you need to forgive? Read verse nine. For what great purpose has God created you and saved you through Christ?

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**Thursday, March 4 – Read Galatians 3** — To prepare for next week's sermon, we will read chapter three today and four tomorrow. Chapter three of Galatians deals with the law and righteousness. Have you ever felt judged or punished by God? Do you know someone that you believe deserves God's punishment? What do you think this passage has to say about judgment and punishment?

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**Friday, March 5 – Read Galatians 4** — Now Paul affirms we are children of God. We have become the rightful heirs to God's Kingdom by our faith in Jesus Christ. How do you believe God treats His children? What kind of parent do you believe God is to you? What does it mean to inherit God's Kingdom?

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