

Galatians Chapter 2 – John Karmelich

1. My title is the expression, "Getting us out of the way, so God can work in our lives". There, that is a mouthful. This message is strictly written to those who already believe that God exists, that Jesus is God and that He is on charge of our lives. The greatest and most consistent challenge to face as a Christian believer is the issue of getting out of the way so God can work in our lives.
 - a) If you recall from last the last lesson, I focused on the question of, "If you knew you only had say 100 days left to live, how would you want to use your time, to make a difference in the world with that time?" I'm following up that question this week with the issue of, "If we are using some time to make that difference, are we trying to impress God with the use of that time, or are we doing it out of gratitude for what He has already done for us?"
 - b) I say this because let's be honest, our ego's constantly get in the way in our relationship with God. We want to prove to God how worthy we are to be with Him and show Him by our efforts that we are worthy to be called to live with Him forever. That is a constant danger we face as believers.
 - c) Consider this from God's perspective: If God is perfect by definition that means He must already know all things. That means He can't love us any more than He does right now. That also means we can't earn His love based on our efforts. There is nothing wrong with wanting to do good things in life. The issue is our attitude about doing them. If we make the effort to please God out of gratitude for what He has already done for us, that should be the only reason to make those efforts, not to earn points with Him.
2. I state all of this to start my lesson, because that is in effect, the main issue of this chapter. When this chapter was written, there were people who wanted new converts to Christianity to convert to Judaism first and then they could believe in Jesus as God. There were two main reasons why this issue was so important. The first is that such Jewish people were worried that if a person can just believe in Jesus and be saved, then what about God's unconditional promises to the nation of Israel? In other words if one can just believe in Jesus and be saved, will that make null and void God's relationship with the nation of Israel? The answer is no, and I'll explain that in a bit.
 - a) The related issue is the behavior of non-Jewish believers. If one just believes in Jesus in order to be saved, what about the behavior such people? If such people, say steal things or even commit murder, what kind of witness is that to God, when we behave badly? The issue is how can we tell if someone trusts in God if they are not acting accordingly. That's why these Jewish people were worried that if non-Jews could be saved by just believing in Jesus, that they would not be a good witness to God. In other words, behavior matters.
 - b) All of this discussion leads me back to my title. We as Christians should be concerned be concerned about our behavior. We should do things to try to please God. The issue is not the works themselves, but our attitude about why we do them. I have learned that there are two main ways Satan likes to make us an ineffective witness for Jesus: The first main way is to lead us into sin because he knows our weakness. The second way is when He makes us think, "You call yourself a Christian? Look how weak is your efforts to do good things in order to please Him. He is so disappointed in you because of our sins or due to the lack of effort we are making to really prove to Him that you (us) are really committed to Him." When we think things like, that, we too become like those Jewish people that are trying to make the effort to get people to be more God like in their lives.
 - c) Those are the types of moments when one has to remember the basics again: God loves us just because He does, and we can't earn that love. A perfect God cannot and will not be impressed with any and all efforts we make to please Him. Therefore, the Christian is called to live a life serving Him not out of necessity, but just because that is the best way for us to live out the time that God has given us to live in this world.

3. Now that I've made us all feel guilty about how we live out our lives, myself included, I can now focus on the chapter itself. Here, Paul focuses on two specific events. The first is a meeting that occurred in Jerusalem between Paul, the leaders of the Christian church there, plus some people that Paul brought with him to that meeting. The outcome of that meeting is the church leaders at that time accepted Gentiles into Christianity without them having to become Jewish first. This is how Paul is telling the Gentile Christians that live in Galatia that the original church in Jerusalem does accept non-Jewish believers just as much as Jewish believes in Jesus.
 - a) The second big event in this chapter is when Paul confronted Peter about a mistake Peter made when Peter visited Paul's current location of Antioch (which is outside of Israel).
 - b) I'm speculating that when Peter came to this town, it was a big event. Here was this man that knew Jesus when he walked the earth. He was a central character in the bible stories and now he is in their midst. I'm sure the Christians living in Antioch all wanted to hear Peter's stories about Jesus. When some Jewish Christians later came to this function, Peter then avoided the Christians living in Antioch and only ate with the Jewish believers. That is what got Paul so upset at Peter, and caused Paul to make a big public statement about Peter's behavior. That exchange between the two of them covers half of the chapter.
 - c) By Peter's act of only eating with Jewish believers in Jesus, Peter was giving the message that being a Jewish Christian is a greater status in life than being a non-Jewish Christian. This was Peter's way of thinking, "Look God how special I am. I am living like a Jewish person amongst these Christians and God must be so impressed with my behavior right now". It is that type of public display of separating one group of believers from another that caused Paul to stand up and confront Peter publicly about how he behaved.
 - d) The point of all of this is not to learn about an incident that happened two thousand years ago in a town that most of us never heard about before. The point is it is really easy for us to get our egos in the way and we try to show God how special we are, by our behavior.
4. In summary, the point of the first story in this chapter is to show that the church in Jerusalem had accepted non-Jewish Christians as being equal with Jewish Christians. The second story is there to show us the danger of when we do mess up and try to prove our worthiness to God.
5. One more thing and then I'll start the chapter. I asked the question a page back of whether or not God's relationship with Israel is "null and void" because of our relationship with Jesus. The short answer is no, but it requires an explanation. This has nothing to do with the righteousness of the modern nation of Israel. This is about God's unconditional promises to them and to us. The bible teaches us that God make an unconditional promise to the nation of Israel that their Messiah (that word means "king") will one day rule the world from Israel. For that promise to literally happen, Israel must exist as a nation. Ever wonder why there are so many people and nations "hell bent" on the destruction of Israel? If you see it from God's perspective it makes a lot more sense.
 - a) With that little speech out of my system, the simple thing to remember is that God has a planned destiny for the Christian church and the nation of Israel that are separate plans. Now that I've said that we can focus on this chapter and how we regularly need to make the effort to get ourselves out of the way so He can work in our lives for His glory.
6. Chapter 2, Verse 1: Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also.
 - a) To understand Verse 1, we need to review a little of where we left off in Chapter 1. As I always tell my new readers, there were no chapter breaks in the original letter. One needs to always study bible verses in context of the surrounding verses.
 - b) With that said, Paul was giving his testimony in the latter part of Chapter 1. He is saying that neither the leaders of the Christian church nor any other person revealed who Jesus was to him. The way Paul learned of Jesus was by a direct revelation by Jesus Himself. This story is told in the Book of Acts Chapter 9. What we learn in Galatians Chapter 1 is that once he had that revelation, he didn't go running to the apostles, but went to go think about it. Three years after that conversion, Paul made his first trip to see the apostles.

- c) That leads me here to Verse 1. Paul says that there was a 14 year gap between his first visit to see the leaders of the Christian church and his second trip to see them. That is amazing when you consider Paul's old life as a devout Jewish believer. That means for a total of 17 years, Paul ignored traveling to Jerusalem for Jewish holidays but instead just focused on preaching Jesus to others and I assume spending time in fellowship with other Christians that Paul had personally converted or met during all of that time frame.
- d) That reminds me of one of the basic points about living the Christian life. It is not about us, but about God working through us. It is about using the most valuable thing we own, our time and saying in effect, "OK God, my time is now your time. How do You want me to use that time for You today?" Paul changed his life so dramatically during these years that he no longer focused on obeying God's laws, but just learned to trust God to guide His life for His glory. The amazing thing is once one learns to rely upon His power and not our own strength is then and only then do we become obedient to what God desires for our lives in the first place.
- e) Meanwhile, I left Paul talking about the fact that after 14 years he planned his second trip to go visit the leaders of the Christian church in Jerusalem. In the book of Acts written by Luke, there are two passages that describe Paul's meeting with the leaders of that church. One meeting takes place in Acts Chapter 11, Verse 30. The second one, a separate event is described in Acts Chapter 15. I'll let scholars' debate which meeting Paul was describing here in Galatians. I believe it was Acts 11, but there are much more educated people than me who love that type of debate. I just want to teach how we should rely upon His power in order to make a difference for Jesus in this world and how that relates to this text.
- f) The next thing Verse 1 mentions is that on this journey Barnabas and Titus went with him.
 - i) So who are these two people and why should I care? Barnabas traveled with Paul on his first missionary journey. He was known to the Christian church leaders in Jerusalem and Barnabas was the one who told those leaders in effect that Paul is no longer persecuting the church and it is safe for him to talk with those leaders.
 - ii) Titus is a non-Jewish preacher of Jesus. That is the same Titus of whom Paul's letter to Titus is written to. A small point to remember later about this meeting is that Paul and Barnabas both have Jewish backgrounds and Titus does not. This will become a key issue as we work our way through this chapter. To spoil the plot, the point is that Titus was not required to become a Jewish believer first in order to become a Christian as decreed by the leaders of the Christian church.

7. Verse 2: I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. ³ Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

- a) The first word I want you to notice here is the word "revelation" in Verse 2. Somehow and somehow God revealed to Paul that he was to go travel to Jerusalem after not being there for 14 years. If this event is from Acts Chapter 11, that book says that the church leaders sent Barnabas to where the Christian church was growing in a city called Antioch. There, Barnabas searched for and found Paul. After they both spent some time in that city there were prophets that came to Jerusalem to warn of a severe famine that was going to happen soon over the whole Roman world. That is when the Christians living in Antioch decided to financially help the Christians living in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas were the ones who delivered this financial gift to Jerusalem. I believe the revelation given to Paul here in Verse 2 is that he should go visit Jerusalem at this time and bring that gift. We'll get more evidence to support that argument coming up later in this chapter.
- b) In effect all of this is background leading up to the key issue of the moment of whether or not Christians had to become Jewish believers first in order to accept Jesus as the Messiah. The underlying issue is the freedom Christians have and what to do with that freedom.

- c) Let me take a quick moment to explain what I mean by freedom. A bible teacher of mine for many years put it best, "I am free to drink all the alcohol I want. I am free to steal all I want. I am free even to kill all I want. The issue is always, how much do I want to." That is the Christian life in a nutshell. We can do all sorts of things that messes up our lives as we live them, but none of them affect our salvation itself. Our salvation is strictly based on our trust in Jesus as God, His death for our sins and as the one who is in charge of our lives. Then we have the freedom to do whatever we want and not lose that salvation.
- i) All of this is important in that Paul had to deal with Jewish people all the time that refused to accept the idea that one could just trust in God's grace and not have to work on their lives in order to be pleasing to God. The key is to consider what is our motivation for doing good works. Are we doing such good works to earn His love for us or just out of gratitude for what He has already done for us? Any time we try to do things in order to tell ourselves or show others the good we are doing, in effect we are trying to add to what God has already done for us. If one gets that concept, then one understands what Christianity is all about.
- d) All of that does lead me back to this big meeting between the Christian church leaders and Paul. We learn in Verse 9 that the leaders of the Christian church were "James, Peter and John". James is the half brother of Jesus who historically became the first bishop over the Christian church in Jerusalem. Peter and John are the same two apostles that we read about in the Gospels. By the way, some English translations call Peter "Cephas". That is a transliteration of the Greek and it just means "stone". That is a nickname that Jesus gave to Peter. Just remember that if you see the word Cephas, it is just another name for Peter.
- e) Anyway, somehow and someway, Paul, along with Barnabas and Titus, got this meeting with the three leaders of the Jerusalem church. These verses mention that the meeting was a private one. What scholars suspect is that before the Peter, James and John had a big meeting with all the Christians that lived in Jerusalem, they first had a private meeting with Paul, Barnabas and Titus. That is why some scholars argue that this meeting ties to the events as described in Acts Chapter 15, not Chapter 11. Now you get the debate. ☺
- f) Here is the important part: In this meeting Titus did not have a Jewish background like everyone else in that meeting. I'm sure in this meeting Paul described how he had lead many non-Jewish (called Gentile) people to Jesus. Paul probably pointed to Titus as an example of someone who was not Jewish and yet devoutly believed in Jesus as God.
- g) That leads to the key point of these verses: The leaders of the Christian church (again, James, John and Peter) did not require Titus to be circumcised. The act of circumcision was considered the first step for a man to become a Jewish convert.
- h) Remember why this is so important. During that 14 year time gap between Paul's first and second visit to Jerusalem (or 17 years if you add the time since Paul's conversion), he lead lots of Gentiles to believe in Jesus. This is a proof of that the Jewish Christian church in Jerusalem publicly accepted the idea of non-Jewish people being saved without first becoming Jews first by accepting Paul and his ministry work.
- i) I can just hear people saying, "OK so what? So the Jewish Christians accepted the idea of non-Jews being saved. That is old news. Why should I care?" Again, the issue for us is not about being Jewish or non-Jewish. The issue is about having to prove to God whether or not we are worthy to be with Him or just to trust in His free gift of salvation in order to be saved. While that also seems like old news, the problem is that we as Christians constantly get our ego's in the way and like to do things in effect to prove to others how worthy we are to be with God.
- ii) Stop and consider why it is people like to describe their lives to others. In effect it is to show others that their lives are "worthy". Why do people often do things in order to help others? To justify to themselves how "worthy" they are. Christianity teaches that God can't learn and we can't prove our worth to Him by our works.

8. Verse 4: This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.⁵ We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.
- a) Just when I think I have jumped off the deep end and deviated from the text, the text itself reminds me that the last point I made fits in well with what I just preached. Just as many people can't accept the idea of just believe in "Jesus payment for our sins and trust Him to guide our lives and that's that" so there were people back then who fought against Paul's teaching in order to make those Christians "slaves" to the law. Let me explain:
 - i) Remember that false teachers did not wear badges saying, "Hello, my name is John and I'm a false teacher." They didn't make big announcements that they want to make people subject to all the Old Testament laws. Such people did want people to be better people. They want you and I to live the type of life that God desires that we live. In that sense, there is nothing wrong with what they teach. The key word is motivation. If one wants to do things in order to live a better life that is a good thing. If one wants to do things in order to prove to God how worthy we are to be called Christians that is in effect when we become slaves (as Paul calls it) to the laws as written in the Old Testament.
 - b) Let me give an illustration. Someone may say, "You call yourself a Christian? Look how you are living right here. If you really want to be a good witness for Jesus, you need to be doing a, b, and c." Then people would be proud of you. There may be nothing bad about "a, b and c". The issue is are we trying to impress God by doing those good things, or are we doing them out of love for Him? The related issue is the question of are trying to live by willpower in order to change our behavior, or just trusting in God to make us into the type of person, He wants us should be to be? That is the underlying issue here.
 - c) In summary, God's laws are not bad things. They are good guides as to how we should live out our lives. The issue is our motivation for obeying them. We should never obey them to show God how much we deserve to be with Him. We should only rely upon His power to be the type of person God wants us to be and realize that the price is completely paid for our sins and we can't do anything to add to that price, no matter how hard we may try to add to it. That is the Gospel message.
 - d) With that said, Paul's point in Verse 5 is that he did not give into this group even for a brief moment in time. The idea is that those people who wanted to add "a, b, and c" to the concept of trust in Jesus for one's salvation and that's that", did not win over Paul one bit.
9. Verse 6: As for those who seemed to be important--whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance--those men added nothing to my message.
- a) Paul is no longer talking about people who wanted to add requirements to the Gospel message. Paul is now focusing on the leaders of the Christian church. Paul is saying in effect, among Christians, there is only God the Father, Jesus His son, and everyone else. No one in the church has a higher statue no matter what their rank or what they have accomplished in their lives.
 - b) Let me give a personal example. My mother had a cousin who was the archbishop for all of Croatia. For those of you familiar with the Roman Catholic Church, that is one rank lower than a cardinal. I suppose it is like a colonel in the army. I met him a few times. Very nice man and very kind to me as a child. When he came to the United States to visit his relatives, it was a big deal. The local Catholic Church had a big dinner in his honor. I remember watching my relatives and those who didn't know him show him lots of honor because of his rank. My point is such a person may hold respect because of his or her job or position, but as far as Paul is concerned and as far as we should be concerned, all saved people have the same status before God and should be treated accordingly.
 - c) Remember that Jesus revealed Himself to Paul. If those church leaders had said to Paul, "you must do this and that" to be a good Christian, Paul would fight against that teaching.

- d) One has to remember as one reads this section that Paul is trying to convince those that are reading this letter that the Gospel message he preached came from God Himself. Paul wants to show in this section that the church leaders accepted him and accepted what it was that he was preaching. Those Christians in Galatia were Gentiles. I believe the reason Paul wrote this section is to show that the leaders of the Jerusalem church accepted those from non-Jewish backgrounds as fellow Christians.
- i) I suspect that if Peter, James and John had told Paul that Gentiles must convert to Judaism first, Paul would have walked away in disgust from these church leaders. Instead Paul makes the statement that as far as God is concerned, he, or you or me have no greater or less standing before God than these other church leaders. To put it another way, there is only saved and unsaved and no additional rank before God in heaven. Peter, James and John may have authority over their churches, but if they are not preaching the same Gospel that Paul preached, I believe Paul would have gone on preaching the Gospel to Gentiles no matter what these guys said.
 - ii) The good news as we'll read in the next verse is that the Christian leaders of the Jerusalem church accepted Paul, as is and in effect also rebutted those who wanted Christians to "add things" to the Gospel message.
10. Verse 7: On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews. ⁸ For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.
- a) My very loose translation: Peter, James and John said, "Good work Paul, keep it up." These leaders of the Jerusalem church recognized that Paul was given a gift from God to lead non-Jewish people to Christ while Peter apparently had a gift to lead Jewish people to Christ. So does that mean if I'm not Jewish I should not study Peter's letters, or if my background is Jewish, I should only study Peter's letters? Of course not. The point is the early church recognized that some people have a special gift to lead others to Jesus and they are just recognizing those gifts. It also doesn't mean that Paul could never preach to Jewish people and Peter can't preach to Gentiles. It just means they recognized their gifts.
 - b) OK John, this is all interesting ancient history. What does it have to do with you and me?
 - i) For starters, God calls on all of us to "pray for witnesses for the harvest". (That is based on Matthew 9:38 or Luke 10:2). The idea is that God wants us involved in the process of leading others to Him. He wants us to pray that God bring in great spiritual leaders for our communities.
 - ii) Over and above that, God calls on all Christians to preach the Gospel and go be a good witness for Him. That is what the "Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19) is all about. That doesn't mean we have to spend every moment passing out Christian tracts to people. It just means we need to care about other people and spend time listening to their stories. If the opportunity arises, and the time is appropriate, be willing share a little about our relationship with God and see what happens.
 - iii) Speaking of people I know, there is a wonderful woman at my church who loves to go "street witnessing" in some of the worst areas around here. It is amazing to see how God works in that woman's life to lead many to Jesus. My point is that God does give some people special gifts for that purpose and we should pray for God to guide such to do His will for their lives.
 - c) In the meantime, we last left Paul stating that the head church guys said to him in effect, "Paul good job. Keep it up. We approve of what you are doing." While such validation may not be necessary in order for us to be a good witness for Christ, it still helps. Let's be honest, we all want to know that we are doing good things. Having those who are church leaders complement us, does give us the strength to move on. That reminds me of one of my favorite expressions about compliments: It is like perfume. A little is nice, but putting on too much overwhelms the room and is not appealing to anyone around us.

11. Verse 9: James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.
- a) Coming back to my mom's cousin the archbishop, he past away long before I ever gave my life to Jesus. While he probably would not have approved of me going outside of the Roman Catholic Church, I am sure that if he met me today, he would have said some sort of compliment about making a difference for Jesus. That was his nature. I want to share with you that story not to brag, but that is how I relate to these verses here.
 - b) One has to remember that when Paul met James, Peter and John here, in effect Paul was still a nobody. Most likely, none of Paul's letters were written yet. He is not famous all over the world like he is today. Paul was just this guy from a Jewish background who was going around to non-Jewish places leading non-Jewish people to Jesus. Because he was developing this reputation for those conversions, Paul here received congratulations and acceptance from the church leaders.
 - i) This does not mean that if we do good things for Jesus our own "archbishops" are going to reach out and congratulate us. Our rewards come in heaven. We should not look for them here on earth. That is the point here.
 - c) Coming back to this verse, stop and consider the fact that the three "pillars" of the early church were two of the original disciples and Jesus half brother. If you read through the Gospels carefully, even among the 12 disciples, there was the "inner three" consisting of Peter, James and John. One gets the impression Jesus focused more on the inner circle to prepare them for greater ministry work. Peter and John wrote parts of the bible and the James that was part of the "inner circle" was the first martyr among those 12 disciples.
 - i) The James who is mentioned in Verse 9 didn't become a disciple until after Jesus was resurrected. He was Jesus' half brother. I personally picture the resurrected Jesus walking up to James and saying something like, "OK, believe me now? Here I was dead and you knew that. Now you see me alive right in front of you". Like Paul, it was an encounter with the resurrected Jesus that convinced that James that Jesus is who He claimed to be. OK, enough background. Back to Paul's letter.
12. Verse 10: All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.
- a) Sometimes what a verse does not say is just as important as what it does say. This verse does not say that Paul had to stop preaching to Gentiles or at least try to convert them to Judaism before they would be accepted by Christians of Jewish background.
 - b) What it does imply that they ask Paul to help the Jewish Christians that live in Jerusalem.
 - c) Let me give a little background here: For a Jewish person to convert to Christianity meant that their families and their communities would shun them. They probably couldn't earn a living in that community. I suspect that is why these church leaders ask Paul to take up a collection as he traveled to help the Jewish Christians. If one reads the book of Acts, one would know that one reason Paul eventually traveled back to Jerusalem was to deliver the money that he had collected to help those people. That collection led to his incarceration as described in Acts when he did eventually return to Jerusalem. (See Acts 24:17.)
 - d) Beginning in the next verse, Paul switches to another story. It is as if Paul was thinking, "Speaking of Peter, let me tell you the story of the time that I (Paul) told Peter publicly to his face how he was wrong about his concept of how one should live by faith in Jesus."
 - e) That leads me back to my lesson title: "Getting us out of the way, so God can work in our lives". Paul is making the case in this section how we can't please God by our efforts. To review this chapter, Paul first says that some were trying to teach Gentile Christians to be Jews first. Then Paul said how the church in Jerusalem accepted him. That will lead us to the next set of verses that shows how even one of the church leaders (Peter) can easily slip back into the wrong way of thinking. Speaking of those verses:

13. Verse 11: When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.¹² Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.
- a) Let me set the scene: Antioch was a city northeast of Israel. It was Paul's "home base" and one of the first places where the Gentile church grew. I'm sure word got around town that "the" Peter was coming for a visit. Here were all these non-Jewish Christians that I'm sure heard lots of stories about Peter now getting to meet him. I'm speculating there was a big potluck meal given in Peter's honor after a church service, where everyone there wanted their chance to sit next to Peter and hear him talk about his encounters with Jesus himself.
 - b) The next thing to remember is that a person from a religious Jewish background back then would not normally eat with non-Jewish people. The point was religious Jewish people considered themselves "separated" for God's use. As a rule they didn't eat with Gentiles. Yet here was Peter, probably with his ego filled with lots of compliments, spending time eating with non-Jewish converts to Christianity. Whether or not Peter ate something like a ham sandwich at this point is a classical debate. ☺
 - c) Coming back to the scene, at this point some other Jewish people show up at the potluck with the Gentile converts. Remember that everyone there was probably watching Peter and wanted to either meet him or just hear his stories. Whoever these Jewish people were that showed up, all we read is that Peter and Barnabas then separated themselves from the Gentile converts to go eat by themselves.
 - i) As I read this, I kept thinking about the big dinner in the town where I grew up, when my mom's cousin the archbishop from Croatia came to visit. It would be like him then getting up and leaving the room to go eat with whoever just showed up. I can picture everyone in the room then questioning why is he separating himself from all the other people that came to share a meal with him.
 - d) One has to understand that in a Jewish culture, to eat with someone means that one also believes they have become "one" with the person they eat with. Picture a bunch of men sitting around all dipping pieces of bread or meat in the same pot of sauce. The reason why Peter and Barnabas separated themselves is that they were not ready yet to accept the idea of being "one" with Gentile converts once other Jews were there in the room.
 - e) Meanwhile, Paul witnessed this and it is time for the public rebuking of that sin.
14. Verse 14: When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter 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?"
- a) The short version here is that Paul went publicly ballistic here because Peter himself did what was wrong publicly. Paul didn't grab Peter to take him aside to explain why it was wrong what he did. Paul knew that this was a key moment in order for all of these non-Jewish converts to Christianity to either be or not be accepted as believers. If someone as famous as Peter would shun believers at this point, it could nullify all the work that Paul had done since he became a believer. Therefore, a public confrontation was needed here.
 - b) As one pastor put it, "Peter, you ate a ham sandwich. I can get the waitress out here and show you the bill that proves that is what you ordered. Now all of sudden, some of your old buddies show up and you want to deny that is what you ate." David Guzik.
 - i) If you don't get the joke, Jewish people were forbidden to eat pork products.
 - c) Let me try this one more way: Peter, if you choose to live by Jewish customs, that is your business. However, you must not encourage other non-Jewish Christians to live the same way. By withdrawing from this Gentile crowd, you are implying that somehow you are more important than they are by your actions. Now take off your big archbishop hat ☺ and remember that you are just as equally saved as all these Gentile Christians.

15. Verse 15: "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' ¹⁶ know that a man 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.
- a) I may have been done imitating Paul, but Paul himself is still busy recalling the time how he personally chewed out Peter. Remember that this is "the" Peter. Try to imagine how non-Jewish readers of Galatians must have reacted when they first heard Paul telling one of Jesus' original 12 disciples that Peter was wrong how he reacted. This is Paul making a public statement that not only is he and all of those Gentile Christians equal in standing with Paul, but that none of them were any better than anyone else in that room.
 - i) It may also help to remember that none of Paul's letters were in circulation when this letter was first written. Paul was not the "pillar" in the church when he had this confrontation with Peter. For Paul to chew Peter out publicly would be like me as a kid, telling my archbishop cousin (in his 60's at that time) how wrong he was acting in some aspect of his faith about Christianity in a public way.
 - b) Meanwhile let me talk a little about what Paul actually said here. In Verse 15, Paul makes the statement to Peter that both of them are Jews and not "Gentile sinners". I would say that statement requires an explanation: Paul is not saying Jewish converts are superior as people to Gentile converts. He is saying that Jewish people were given the privilege of understanding God's laws and what are His requirements to be with God in heaven.
 - i) To put it another way, there is an old joke that goes, there are two ways to get into heaven. The first is to never disobey any of God's laws even once and then we can tell Jesus to move over. ☺ The second is to trust in Jesus complete payment for all of our sins (past, present and future) and not try to prove to God how worthy we are to be with Him in heaven.
 - c) That leads me back to Verse 16. Paul is making the statement that he understood that the real purpose of God's laws is to show how impossible it is to be pleasing to God by trying to obey the laws and the traditional Jewish interpretation of those laws. Paul understood that the law shows us how impossible it is to keep it in the first place, no matter how hard people try to keep it. This doesn't mean one should ignore those laws. It just means that without God's power working through us, we our own don't have the power to be able to be pleasing to God in the first place. God only gives us that power once we realize we are unable to keep that law based on our will power and are willing to trust in Jesus as God as our complete payment for our sins.
 - i) Let me try this one more way and I promise I'll move on. Does God want us to steal and murder? Of course not. In that sense, the "laws" are still on the books. However, it is only by His power that we can have the strength to not do what is our natural desire to do. Let's be honest, we crave things. It is only by realizing that God exists and He will judge our lives that we seek Him in the first place and desire that He guide us to live the type of life that He desires that we live.
16. Verse 17: "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!
- a) I admit, Verse 17 reads like it belongs more in the book of Romans than it does here in the book of Galatians. That is because the style of Romans is Paul asking out loud a bunch of hypothetical questions and then answering them. It is like Paul debating himself.
 - b) I picture Paul talking to Peter and the other Jewish people eating with Peter. I suspect those other Jewish people brought up this question (as listed here in Verse 17) in response to Paul's claim that Peter was sinning by not eating with Gentile converts to Christianity.
 - c) Let me give my very loose translation of this verse: Paul are you saying that if anyone just accepts Jesus, are we then free to sin all we want? The fear of these Jewish people is that if someone just accepts Jesus, now they can go say steal and cheat all they want.

- d) My response to that charge is what I stated earlier in this lesson. To repeat what a former pastor of mine once said, "I am free to drink all the alcohol I want. I am free to steal all I want to steal. The question is how much do I want to?"
 - i) That in effect is how Paul gives his response to that charge. Paul says "Absolutely not" as it translated here in the text. To say it another way. There is no way at all that Jesus wants us to sin. Jesus wants Gentile converts to Christianity to trust in God the Father to guide their lives. However, they and us can't do it by their own willpower. All of us are only saved based on what Jesus did on the cross.
 - ii) The next step in that salvation process is then to trust Jesus to guide our lives. Then and only then can we have the power to live the type of life God wants us to live in order to make a difference for Him.
 - e) So should Peter have eaten that ham sandwich or not? I would say that if he did choose to still live under Jewish customs, he has every right to do so, but he should not force non-Jewish people to do likewise. At the same time, Peter should have not separated himself from Gentile converts as Peter has no higher standing in God's eyes than any other person who trusts in Jesus including you and me.
 - i) So John are you saying when we get to heaven Peter will not be up in front and you and I will be in the back? I have no idea. I just know that as far being saved, we have the same standing before God than any and all of the apostles. As I have taught in other lessons, I am convinced our rewards in heaven are based on our faithfulness to what God has called us to do and not say, the specific number of people we have lead to Jesus.
17. Verse 18: If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. ¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.
- a) Meanwhile, Paul is still all riled up in his anger over how Peter acted. I suspect that as the two of them confronted each other, there were a bunch of other Jewish and maybe Gentile believers either arguing with them or at the least listening carefully to this debate.
 - b) This leads me to Paul's statement here in Verse 18. To explain, first one has to understand what Paul meant by "destroyed". What he destroyed was his own ability to be completely obedient to God's laws based on Paul's own willpower. Paul is saying that if he tried once again to live that way, it would only prove that Paul himself is a "lawbreaker" because he understood that based on his own willpower he couldn't be perfect in his obedience to that set of rules. Neither can you or I and that is the point being made here.
 - c) However the bad news of Verse 18 leads to the good news of Verse 19. The good news is that Paul stopped trying through willpower to be obedient to the law so that through the power of the Holy Spirit living within us, given to us when we trust in Jesus complete payment for our sins, then and only then can we live to make a difference for God.
(There, that is a long enough run-on sentence to make Paul proud of me. ☺)
 - d) The question of this lesson comes down to this key concept: Can one be saved by trusting in obeying God's laws. Remember that the Old Testament has a whole set of rituals that one can perform to be forgiven of one's sins. Why can't one trust in those rituals and not have to trust in Jesus payment for one's sins. The realization that the method as taught in the Old Testament doesn't work is what Paul realized. It is a key to understanding how it is that we as people are to live. Let me explain:
 - i) Paul is not saying God was wrong about the Old Testament ritual doing an animal sacrifice in order to be forgiven of one's sins. Paul is saying that the method is not sufficient in that it never takes away our desire to sin. Yes, John, but us Christians still have the desire to sin. That too, is the problem. The rituals of offering those animal sacrifices do show one's willing to turn from those specific sins, but we still have that desire to sin. It is only by God Himself willing to pay the complete price for our sins that we can now for sure that we are 100% forgiven of all our sins.

- ii) I remember hearing from a Christian with a Jewish background talking about one of his devoutly Jewish (non-Christian) friends who said at his deathbed: "If only I could trust in Jesus as my Savior then and only then I could know for sure that I was completely forgiven of all my sins. As a religious Jew, I can only be forgiven for what I asked forgiveness for. I can't know for sure that I am saved.
 - iii) That is in effect the point Paul is making in Verse 19. He knew he had to die in the sense of not trying to prove his value to God by how he lived. It sunk in that Paul needed to trust in God's provision for sin and not his own ability to please God. Yes Paul still wanted to live a life to be pleasing to God, but He does that as we do that by trusting in His power and not Paul's own ability to be pleasing to Him.
 - iv) That in effect, is Verse 19. Ready for Verse 20.
18. Verse 20: I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
- a) OK, it's memorization time. If I had to pick one verse in this chapter to memorize, this would be the one. Since I haven't done it yet myself I am putting a burden on myself that I would like others to join me in. I'm not adding to my salvation by this effort. I am just saying it would be a good verse to keep in mind as we live the life that God desires of us.
 - b) Let's start this verse with the question: What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? To state the obvious, Paul is not being literal as he never volunteered to be crucified himself.
 - i) What that verse means is that it was Paul's desire to live to no longer do what was his will for his life, but God the Father's will. Did Paul do this perfectly? No, and neither do you nor I. The point is the best way for us to live is to realize the fact that if we do trust in Jesus as being God, being resurrected and being in charge of our lives, then we do have in effect Jesus living within us.
 - ii) The idea of Jesus living within us is not something we can sense, but just trust in. Think about it this way: What do you think gives us the desire to please God in the first place? It is God living within us to begin with. As I like to state a lot as of late, God does not violate our free will. At any moment in time, even as a saved believer, it is always up to us at any moment to do our will or God's will.
 - c) That leads to the big question: How do we know when we are doing God's will? To state the obvious, God doesn't speak out loud to us. We can only use the evidence of our lives to know if we are doing His will or not. The way I view it is if I desire to please Him then I will make the effort to pray and to seek Him both individually and with other believers. Since I want to be obedient, then I will regularly read my bible and pray and trust that He is guiding my life. Then, I literally do what I want, knowing that it is my desire to please Him and I ask Him daily to guide my life for His glory.
 - d) If one gets that concept, then in a sense, one gets Christianity: It is all about living with the idea that God desires to guide our lives, God will provide us with the power to do what is His will at any one moment in time and He will guide us as He desires. I am not saying that it is easy. It requires us to make the regular effort to keep God in our minds.
 - e) So are you saying we have to work to earn our salvation? Never. I am saying because we are saved, we should desire to please Him and want to make a difference for Him.
 - f) That is why I desire all of us to learn the principal behind this verse. Not that memorizing one specific translation will make us a better person, but that learning the concept that we are crucified with Christ when we trust Him to guide our lives and not trust in ourselves is the secret to living the Christian life. (Once again, I am convinced Paul would love my run on sentences.)
 - g) With that said, we only have one more verse to cover and we have made it through the topic of "Getting ourselves out of the way, so God can work in our lives". The next line is Paul's final point before he switches to another topic that covers the last three chapters of this book.

19. Verse 21: I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"
- a) This final verse of the question asks a question that has been debated by people for about 2,000 years now. The question is in effect, "If we could go to heaven by just being a good person, then in effect Jesus died for no reason." This is a question everyone has to think about themselves and come to their own conclusion about Jesus.
 - b) To state the obvious, many people reject Jesus because they either believe there is no God and therefore no heaven, or they believe that God will accept them just the way they are.
 - i) I remember watching a short movie by an evangelist who randomly interviewed people walking down a busy street and just asked them a simple question: Do you believe heaven exists and are you going there after you die? It was amazing to watch person after person say in effect they believe heaven exists and that they are good enough to get into heaven because they are a good person. In effect, all of those people are saying that Jesus' death was not necessary for their salvation.
 - ii) (For those who are interested, the evangelist name is Ray Comfort. I'm guessing that this video is now on youtube.com if one wants to search for it.)
 - c) Back to the question at hand. I'm speculating that most of the people reading this lesson already are questions and already believe that Jesus has paid the price for one's sins. If that is the case then the key question for us is what are we doing about that death. I am not in anyway suggesting that we have to work harder to earn our salvation. Hopefully by now I've beaten that point to death. The issue always comes back to what are doing with the most valuable asset we own, our time? Are we using some of our time to make a difference for Jesus or not? Again, I am not saying this out of guilt or saying it because we have to. I am saying that that if we are grateful for our salvation we should want to use our time to make a difference for God and that is what good works is all about.
 - d) This would be a great place to end the letter, but Paul has a few more chapters to go. One has to understand that Paul couldn't call Christians on the phone in Galatia and see how they were doing. He was concerned about them because there were false teachers in that area who were still trying to make the case that one has to work hard to earn God's love for them. Paul is going to give arguments from the Old Testament just to prove that false argument is well, false. However, I'll leave that discussion for the next lesson.
20. Father, first of all we thank you that we don't have to earn our salvation. We don't have to prove to You that we are good enough to be saved. With that in mind, help us to use the most valuable thing that You have given us, our time and our resources to make a difference for You. Give us the wisdom on how You specifically want us to use our time and resources. Make it obvious to us what You desire us to do and not what someone else tells us to do. Help us to be good servants for You, do Your will, trust that You are guiding us and make a difference for You in this world. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen