

**Gal. 2:15-21, The Transition**  
**September 8, 1988, Revised September 24, 1988**  
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**A. 2:14-21, Overview**

At first glance, it is not at all clear where Paul's words to Peter stop and his address to the Galatians begins.

1. Observe the shift in pronouns. 2:14 is clearly to Peter, while 3:1 is clearly to the Galatians.
  - a) 2:14, thou (Peter).
  - b) 2:15-17, we.
  - c) 2:18-21, I.
  - d) 3:1, you (Galatians).
  
2. The structure of 2:15-21 anticipates the structure of chapters 3-5, suggesting that this material has been specially composed for this letter, though the subject matter may well be drawn from Paul's recollection of his discussion with Peter in Antioch. Note two contrasts: factual statements vs. errors corrected; and salvation vs. sanctification:

	Salvation	Sanctification
	HOW	RESULTS of just'n
Factual	15-16	18-20
Errors	21	17
	v	v
	3:2	3:3
	3:5-4:11	4:12-5:1

The salvation/sanctification contrast persists through chs. 3-4.

**B. 2:15-16, 21: MEANS of our justification.**

1. Stated positively, 2:15-16: We have sought salvation through faith in Christ, not works. Core is middle of 2:16, "Even we have believed in Jesus Christ." Note three modifying statements.
  - a) WHO is doing the believing: 2:15, "we Jews," contrasted with "sinners of the Gentiles."
    - 1) Does not mean that the Jews were NOT sinners.
    - 2) Rather, the term highlights the fact that the Gentiles do not even have the law. Cf. Matt. 26:45; Luke 6:32ff // Matt. 5:47 (minority).
    - 3) Thus emphasizes that they DID have the law, and in spite of it, turned to a law-less way of salvation.
  
  - b) WHAT has led them to believe? Their knowledge that a man is not justified by works of the law, but by trusting in Christ. This in turn is founded on Scripture, Ps. 143:2, quoted at the end of 2:16.

- c) WHY did they believe? "That we might be justified...." There's the crux of the whole matter. You may have many things by keeping the law--respectability, acceptance in the Jewish community, a certain feeling of proud superiority over the Gentiles. But if you desire justification, a right standing before God, you can never get it from the law. You must rest in faith on Christ alone.
2. Stated negatively, 2:21: I do not reject the grace of God, as I would if I sought justification by the law. For in that case, the death of Christ would have been gratuitous.
- a) agetew: (not in sermon)
- 1) Fail to abide by a verbal standard (request, command, promise) (human subjects)
    - a> Mar. 6:26, to turn down someone's request.
    - b> Mar. 7:9, reject (= disobey) God's commandment. Luk 7:30; 1Th 4:8; Heb 10:28
    - c> Luk 10:16. reject, opposite of hear. Joh 12:48
    - d> GAL 3:15 to diminish or evade a human covenant. Parallel "add to." 1TI 5:12, repudiate a promise.
  - 2) Destroy or abolish (all have God as subject)
    - a> 1CO 1:19 parallel to )Apolw^; what God will do with ungodly understanding.
    - b> HEB 9:26 Christ did this to sin by his sacrifice.
    - c> HEB 7:18 What God has done done to the antecedent priestly law.
- b) dwrea in Paul: almost always (7/10 times) associated with XARIS. Thus this is a pun: Christ's death was gracious, but not gratuitous. That would cheapen grace. EX: Contrast the gift of a loaf of bread to a starving man, and to a baker. It is a gift in both cases, but in the first it is incalculably valuable; in the second, worthless. The difference is whether it meets a need.
- 1) Alone: 3 times.
    - a> 2CO 11:7 How P. preached the gospel: without charge.
    - b> 2TH 3:8 How P. did not eat their bread:
    - c> HEB 6:4 "the heavenly gift":
  - 2) With xari: 7 times.
    - a> Soteriological
      - 1> ROM 3:24 How we are justified, // "by his grace":
      - 2> ROM 5:15 // "grace of God," said to be "in grace":
      - 3> ROM 5:17 What we have received abundance of; // grace:
      - 4> 2CO 9:15 Thanks ("grace") to God for his gift.
      - 5> GAL 2:21 (our verse)
    - b> Spiritual gift
      - 1> EPH 3:7 The gift of the grace of God that was given to me:
      - 2> EPH 4:7 Grace acc. to the measure of the gift of

Christ.

C. **2:17-20: RESULTS of our justification.**

Contrary to what our adversaries say, this does not make us sinners. We would be sinners if we did otherwise!

1. The challenge, 2:17a.

- a) You seek to be justified in Christ, apart from the law.
- b) As a result, you become like the Gentiles, "sinners." Case in point: Paul in Antioch, and Peter in Caesarea, violating Pharisaic tradition by eating with heathen.
- c) Thus Christ has led you into sin!

2. The response, 2:17b-20: God Forbid. Two reasons (GAR) given.

a) First reason, 2:18: What Paul has done.

It is not sin to reject the law in favor of Christ, as Paul has done. In fact, to seek to restore the law would be sin! (And this is what Peter is doing, returning to a separation between Jew and Gentile after arguing against it in Acts.) Cf. Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34. Paul has smashed down the Jericho of the law, and curses anyone who would rebuild it.

b) Second reason, 2:19-20: What has been done to Paul. Two things: death and life. Each stated twice, once in detail and once in summary. Use upper case for detail, lower for summary: DEATH life death LIFE. These verses are the seed from which Rom. 6-7 later grows; these chapters are the best commentary on them. Note Rom. 6:1-7.

1) Detail on death, 2:19a. This is what I have spent about three full days puzzling over. "Hard to be understood," 2 Pet. 3:16. May God guard us from "wresting" this to our own destruction.

a> Has the same structure as Rom. 7:4

1> The believer is dead.

2> This death is "to the law," removing him from its power.

3> The objective is to serve God:

a: Gal, "live unto God"

b: Rom, "bring forth fruit unto God."

4> How about the means? These seem strangely different.

a: Rom: "through the body of Christ."

b: Gal: "through the law."

b> *through the law*: the expression "through (the) law" (vv.5,7) or "through (the) commandment" (vv.8,11,13) occurs five times in Rom. 7, telling what sin did to Paul. Two main things:

1> Increased his sin. 7:5,8; cf. Gal. 5:20. But in what sense does the law increase sin?

a: "stirring up sinful passions"? Increasing the objective occurrence of sin, through rebellion against it? This may happen in some cases, but it seems unlikely that it is what Paul has in mind, especially in this autobiographical section:  
1: Not needed for sin, Rom. 2:12; 5:14.  
2: This was not Paul's problem. Phil. 3:6; Acts 23:1; 24:16. There are two kinds of sinners: those who rebel against the law, and those who proudly think that they keep it. Paul was the second type.

b: I think these references describe a *subjective* increase in sin, an increase in sin in one's consciousness: Jn. 15:22; Rom. 3:20; 7:7; Gal. 3:19-25. That is, the law brings one to know of one's sin; makes one aware that one is swarming with sin.

2> Slew him. 7:11,13

a: To understand this, must realize that death in Paul's writings is not only physical death or spiritual death, but also strong emotional suffering, without spiritual implications: contrast 2 Co. 7:10; 1 Th 3:8. Also 1CO 15:31; 2CO 4:11,12; 6:9; 11:23.

b: Think of the impact on this self-righteous pharisee when all of a sudden he saw his body creeping with sin. His entire objective in life, to fulfill the law, was shattered. When the HS unveiled the law in its true meaning to his mind, he suddenly saw that he was as filthy as he had previously thought himself to be pure.

3> How has sin slain us through the law? Note that we are said to die both in 7:4 and in 7:9,10,11,13. Compare and contrast these.

a: *Objectively*, IN CHRIST, Rom. 7:4. Our sin is on him; the law thus demands his death. That death is ours; because we are in him, thus sin has through the law slain us in him.

b: Note the emphasis in 7:11-13 on the *subjective* side of our death with Christ. When the HS makes God's law real to our minds and brings us to the knowledge of our sin, we feel dead. We are overwhelmed with guilt, and find ourselves hopeless, overcome with remorse at having dishonored a holy God. This is biblical repentance. It may be a work of a few days, as with Paul in Damascus; or of years. However long

it takes, it is a vital component of salvation.

c> *to the law*: So far as the law is concerned, we are dead. Thus it has no claims on us. The parallel in Rom. 7:4 likens its authority over us now to the authority of the law of adultery over a widow, who as wife has died with her husband.

d> *Question*: Doesn't sin slay all unbelievers? If so, why aren't they freed from the law?

*Answer*: The deaths of Gal. 2:19 and Rom. 7:4 happen only to the elect. Only the work of the HS makes the law of God so real to a man's conscience that he "dies" the death of repentance that Paul here describes. Only the HS baptizes us into the body of Christ so that we are said to die and rise with him. Distinguish the following kinds of "death" in the Bible, by realm, subjects, and time.

	Realm	Subjects	Time
Physical	Body	All	End of phys life
Spiritual	Spirit	All	In Adam
Second	B&S	Lost	Final judgment
Emotional	Mind	All	Severe shock
	(Gal. 2:19 is a variety of this; only the elect experience this particular shock, and thus this death)		
W/Christ	Spirit	Elect	At cross

2) Summary on life, *that I might live to God*: Again cf. Rom. 7:4, "that we should bring forth fruit unto God." He is the purpose, the goal, of our entire existence. This focus on the godward direction of our new life is emphasized in 20.

3) Summary on death, 2:19b.

Two words in Greek. "I stand crucified with Christ." Restatement of "I through the law died to the law." Cf. Rom. 6:1-7.

4) Detail on life, 2:20. One thing can be said for it: it is centered in Christ.

a> He is the *agent* of this new life. "Not I, but Christ." Just as he took my place in death, so now he lives through me in life. I am to have no ambitions or goals of my own, but to live entirely for him. Rom. 6:19,22.

b> He is the *means* by which I live. I do live a life in flesh, but must constantly trust in him for strength and direction. "Faith of the Son of God" is objective genitive, faith directed toward him.

c> He is the *motive* for this life. "Who loved me and gave himself for me." Every other religion says, "If you are

good enough, God will save you." Christianity says, "Consider what God has done in saving you, and out of gratitude, be good."

D. **Conclusion**

These verses give a compact statement of the means and results of salvation.

1. Means: By faith in Christ alone, totally apart from any obedience to the law of God on our part. In fact, that law, so far from saving us, can only condemn us.
2. Result: We are a new person, having died in Christ the death our sins deserved, and now living a new life of dedication and service to Christ and God.