PITWM VERSE BY VERSE **GALATIANS 2:15-21; 3:1-5** LESSON: HOLD FAST TO THE GOSPEL—

June 22, 2025

INTRODUCTION

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CHAPTER 2:11-14 —Apparently, sometime after the meeting described in the previous verses, Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch (2:11). At first he mingled freely with the Gentiles, enjoying their fellowship. Then some men from Jerusalem arrived who followed strict Jewish traditions. They considered those as ones who did not comply with Jewish ceremonial cleanliness and circumcision to be unclean. Peter was an impulsive man who could show amazing faith and courage one minute, and fail completely the next. Peter was not afraid to preach the Gospel before unbelievers, but suddenly became fearful of this peer pressure and withdrew from his Gentile friends (2:12). Not only did he exhibit a hypocritical attitude, but he led Barnabas and others astray with him (2:13). Paul sees this as a threat to Christian freedom, so he confronts Peter about this inconsistency before every one (publicly) (2:14). In Peter's actions, he displayed that Christ was not sufficient.

Paul's words must have stung Peter as he said, "You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile. The law cannot save us; but after we have become Christians, it can guide us to live as God requires. Now, you want the Gentiles to live like Jews. What kind of inconsistency is that? "Three Biblical principles to glean from:

- We are to be accountable to one another.
- II. What we do has an effect on others.
- III. Our commitment to truth cannot be merely intellectual, but must be lived.

LESSON: I. GALATIANS 2:15-18

2:15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, — Paul continues by saying, "We", meaning, Paul, Peter and Barnabas, and the rest of the Jews at Antioch were Jews by birth, were descendance of Jewish parents, and from their infancy were brought up in the Jewish religion, and under the law of Moses, and in the observance of it, with special privileges and prerogatives. "We" were the ones brought up as law-keeping Jews, not as law-neglecting Gentiles. The Gentile sinners did not attempt to follow the Old Testament laws. Paul goes on to let Peter know that, "We" know better; we weren't guilty of the flagrant and constant neglect of the Jewish dietary laws; the Gentiles neither knew nor kept the rigorous legal requirements of Jewish life, so they were all automatically in the category of "sinners."

2:16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Paul is reminding Peter and the others, that even though they had been Jews, they had to come to Christ through faith, not works. The Judaizers did not believe this. They proclaimed that salvation is done by hard work. That means they observed the law which justified them over Christ justifying them. Why is it that a man can never be justified, nor even secure righteousness by works and law? - Why is it that a man can never approach God by works and law? Some need to know this. There are two ways that a man can secure righteousness, and approach God. He can try on his works of the law or he can believe in Jesus Christ.

1. A man can do this **Only** if he can keep the law perfectly, never breaking it once, and never violating it http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html

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a single time. Only if he can make sure that every single thing he ever does or thinks is perfectly good and righteous and pure. Only if he can please God in every act, word and thought, never displeasing God in anything. Only if a man can do this, can he secure righteousness, works and law. However, this is very impossible to do. A person may try, but he can never achieve this kind of perfection! However...

- 2. A man can do this by believing that Jesus Christ is God's gift of righteousness to the world; **Believe This**: that God so loved the world, that
 - a. He gave His only Begotten Son to live a perfect life upon earth in order to secure the Perfect and Ideal Righteousness for man; that
 - b. He gave His Son to take the unrighteousness of man upon Himself and to die for man, that is, to bear the judgment of unrighteousness for man; that
 - c. he gave His Son to arise from the dead for man in order to conquer death, hell, and the grave, and to give man a new and perfect life that is eternal.
 - i. A man can believe that God loves him and takes his faith in Christ and counts it as righteousness.
 - ii. A man can believe that God loves him and accepts him because he honors His Son Jesus Christ.
 - iii. And lastly: A man can believe that God loves His Son so much that He will take any man who honors His Son and do anything for Him. ("For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is a gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" Eph.2:8-9).

"Justification" is the judicial act of God whereby He declares righteous those who trust in Christ. It is the reversal of His attitude toward the sinner because of the sinner's new relationship to Christ. This means that all the guilt and penalty of the believer is removed forever (Rom.8:1- "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit"). The perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed (credited) to US! It's No longer from the works of the law. Jesus is our perfect righteousness! It's not on man's fleshly deeds of obedience to the law— It's all by faith we in Jesus Christ,

NOTE: Faith is not the ground of justification—<u>Grace is!</u> It is not faith in our faith but faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is wholly by divine mercy (Tit.3:5) and not by human merit. "...even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law:" Even the Jews with all their privileges are no better than the Gentiles. Their law was inadequate and insufficient to bring them into a right relationship with God. Therefore, it was necessary for Jews to believe in Christ in order to be justified. "...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Since no flesh, Jews or Gentiles could ever be justified by the works of the law, how ridiculous it is to bind the burden of law/works on the Gentiles who were already justified by faith in Christ. The order is: knowing, believing, justified.

2:17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. ¹It was an admission on the part of Jewish Christians that justification by works proves that they are sinners. Their failure in keeping the law forces them to admit their sinful condition. So, they did not find righteousness in keeping the law, here's Paul's brilliant answer: First, yes, we seek to be justified by Christ, but not by Christ plus our own works.

²It is utterly crucial that you see what Paul is admitting, and what he is denying. He is admitting first that he and Peter and other Jewish Christians are seeking justification not in works of law, but only in Christ (in what



http://versebyversecommentary.com/galatians/galatians-217/ 3
 http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper83/030683.htm

http://www.soundofgrace.com/piper83/030683.htm http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html

Christ did at the cross). And he is admitting Secondly, that in doing this they become "sinners" because we ITW cannot keep God's laws perfectly. Yes, we are found to be "sinners" in this sense. That's what he admits.

But he denies emphatically that this makes Christ an agent/minister of sin. Yes, we ourselves also are found sinners, that is, we acknowledge that we still sin even though we stand justified by Christ. But no, this certainly does not make Jesus the author or approver of sin in our lives. If God declares a person right in His eyes by faith, does this make Christians lawless? Legalists argued, "If Christ does away with the law for salvation and sanctification, then that would make Christ lawless." But Paul denies emphatically that this makes Christ an agent of sin. Why? - Because Christ dealt with the sin issue on the cross. Christ is not the agent of sin. He is the agent/minister of freedom; Freedom for God and freedom for love. That's Paul's answer to the Judaizers: Christ is the Only One who freed us from the works of law!

2:18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. Paul's answer is that if he were to build again those things which he had torn down, then he would prove himself a transgressor." What had Paul torn down? Paul had torn down the law as a means of justification. Therefore, if he now builds a way to God through keeping the Law of Moses, then he would make himself a transgressor.

Essentially, Paul says "There is more sin in trying to find acceptance before God by our law-keeping than there is sin in everyday life as a Christian." A "transgressor" is someone who crosses over a line or standard. Paul would violate the standard of grace if he reverted to law.

- i. ³These certain men from James thought they had to hang on to the Law for themselves and for Gentiles — so there wouldn't be so much sin. What Paul shows is that by putting themselves under the law again, they are sinning worse than ever!
- ii. How is it a sin to build again a way to God through the Law of Moses? Well, in many ways, but perhaps the greatest is that it looks at Jesus, hanging on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved, bearing the wrath of God for us, and says to Him, "That's all very nice, but it isn't enough. Your work on the cross won't be good enough before God until I'm circumcised and eat kosher." What an insult to the Son of God!
- iii. Of course, this is the great tragedy of legalism. In trying to be more right with God, they end up being less right with God. This was exactly the situation of the Pharisees that opposed Jesus so much during His years of earthly ministry. Paul knew this thinking well, having been a Pharisee himself (Acts 23:6).

GALATIANS 2:19-21 II.

2:19 For I through the law am dead to the law, —Paul makes a bold statement, by using himself, saying that "I have died to the law." If he is dead to the law, then it is impossible for the law to be the way he stands accepted by God. It was the law that demanded Christ's death for our sin because God cannot tolerate sin of any kind. ⁴If ever a man tried to be saved by keeping the law, it was Paul. Philippians 3 tells us how hard he worked to earn God's favor. He was a "Hebrew of the Hebrews," a trained Pharisee, a learned doctor of the law, and a man zealous to keep every commandment so that he might earn God's favor. He was far beyond his contemporaries in terms of outward obedience. If salvation came by keeping the rules, Paul had it made. He was going to heaven for sure. Then he met Christ and everything changed. Once Christ transformed his life, he looked back at his self-righteous law keeping and concluded that it was dung compared with the joy of knowing Christ personally. All those things he tried to do to commend himself to God utterly failed. They failed not because they were bad, but because they could not change his heart.

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³ http://new.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?bk=47&ch=2&vs=undefined

⁴ http://www.keepbelieving.com/sermon/2001-06-10-How-God-Saves-Sinners-Coming-to-Grips-with-Justification-by-Faith http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html

Outward obedience can never change human nature. Paul needed something the law could not provide—he will be a sinner, but it could not provide new life.

Not only are we dead through the law, we are dead to the law. "To die to the law is to renounce it and to be freed from its dominion, so that we have no confidence in it, and it does not hold us captive under the yoke of slavery." (Calvin).

2:19b ...that I might live unto God —What the law could not do, Christ has done for us. Rule keeping produces guilt and leaves us dead in the road. But when Christ enters, we find new life. To be alive unto God means that we no longer live for self, but instead we live for God's glory. Once you come to Christ, you're a brand-new person. You can never go back to the old person you used to be. You can try, but you won't like it. You won't be happy. You won't be satisfied. A believer is justified by living for God. He lives for God by doing four things.

1. The believer lives for God by dying to the law. The law shows a man that he is a sinner, and that he comes ever so short of perfection and righteousness.

Paul thought God would accept him because of his law-keeping. But he came to the point where he really understood the law — understanding it in the way Jesus explained it in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7)— and Paul realized that the law made him guilty before God, not justified before God. The law has no remedy for sin, Jesus does. The law cannot bring life because no one ever lived up to the law except Jesus Christ.

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When Paul died to the law, then he could live to God because the law lost all its claims on him. As long as he still tried to justify himself before God, by all his law-keeping, he was dead. But when he died to the law, then he could live to God and you can't arrest a dead man. We can live to God because we have new life in Christ.

2:20 I am crucified with Christ:— This is not a literal crucifixion on the cross. This is the symbolism of Crucifixion. "Crucifixion" was death by torture; Painful (excruciating, "on the cross"). Paul speaks of a real death that can be excruciating as we put our "old man; our old nature" to death for the sake of Christ. Christ is Lord over the Law, because He was crucified unto the Law. Death was Paul's one chance of escape from the penalty of the law. The only way to be acceptable to God is to die to the law. By my faith in Christ, I am crucified with Christ. I have been delivered from the Law. I am crucified and dead unto the Law. God takes that; my faith and... counts my faith as me having died in Christ.

- counts my faith as identification with Christ in death.
- counts my faith as me having already been punished for sin through Christ's Crucifixion.

2:20b But ...nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me:— He's saying that he's not literally dead but spiritually alive because Christ is in charge of his life. It is Christ living by means of the Holy Spirit in him. It is crucial to understand this point. Christ does not live His life through us, but we live His life when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us. Believers see themselves living in a state of dependence on Christ; no longer to the law.

2:20c ...and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. So, Paul living in the flesh does not live after the flesh anymore. Why? Because God gave His life for him/for us, therefore, it's no longer I who's living inside, but it's really Christ living inside by the power of the Holy Spirit. How? It was something that God did for him/for us. Paul

⁵ http://www.blueletterbible.org/commentaries/comm_view.cfm?AuthorID=2&contentID=8028&commInfo=31&topic=Galatians&a=Gal_2_17
http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html

cannot take credit for his crucifixion. ⁶Paul placed his faith in the Son of God, that is, His divine Sonship. "Whaul's new life is faith-based, not flesh-based. Faith is the link that binds Paul to Christ. Instead of attempting to measure up to the law, Paul lives his new life in Christ by faith. The Lord's love and sacrifice motivates us to live for Him.

- 2. The believer lives for God by being crucified with Christ.
- 3. The believer lives for God by allowing Christ to live His life through his body.

2:21 I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain. The word "frustrate" (atheto) means to set aside, void, invalidate, make ineffective, or nullify. Therefore, if we go back to the law, we cancel out the work of the cross. ⁷To nullify grace would be to put one's trust, not in the salvation as God's free gift, but in one's own efforts. We don't want this. To do this is to reject grace altogether; relying on one's puny effort means that one nullifies that grace." (Morris)

4. The believer lives for God by trusting the grace of God, that is, trusting Jesus Christ who is God's righteousness.

The Judaizers wanted to mix law and grace, but Paul told us that this is impossible. To go back to the law means to set aside the grace of God. If there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law. The law was our schoolmaster to reveal to us how badly we needed a Savior. Christ gave His body on the cross that we might live. He purchased our salvation with His precious blood. He quickens our spirit to eternal life in Him. Returning to the law nullifies the cross. Law says do; Grace says done! It is finished! Therefore, Christ did not die in vain.

GALATIANS 3:1-5

Paul addresses his readers directly with a series of piercing questions. These questions are asked in a tone of rebuke as he gives them real answers, for they are in error! The next passage will answer questions.

3:1 O foolish Galatians, — ⁸Why does Paul call those to whom he writes, "Foolish"? -Because they were acting in error.

1. Error makes a person foolish. The Galatians were listening to false teaching, and were not thinking through what was being taught.

Does he not know that if he insults those to whom he writes, they will pay no attention to his message? How is it that he violates the accepted principles of dealing with people? Wasn't Paul afraid that he would offend them? The word that our translators chose to translate "foolish" is the Greek word "anoetos," when originally coined for use, meant: "to act as though the mind was inoperative, or worse, non-existent." This is a word that means to know the truth, and to just simply act unreasonably or irrationally - basically to be an idiot. They were truly misunderstanding, thoughtless, and unthinking.

3:1b ...who hath bewitched you?

2. Error deceives a person. "Bewitched" is an odd word to the New Testament. It is used only this one time in all of the writings of the authors of the New Testament. Barclay translates bewitched as: "put the evil eye on." The "evil eye" was thought to work in the way a serpent could hypnotize its prey with its eyes.

Once the victim looked into the "evil eye," a spell could be cast. By using the term "bewitched," Paul gives the idea that the Galatians are under some type of spell being that the false teachers were very capable, fluent, and persuasive speakers. It seems that the false teaching sounded reasonable and logical.





http://versebyversecommentary.com/galatians/galatians-220e/
 http://new.studylight.org/com/guz/view.cgi?bk=47&ch=2&vs=undefined11
 http://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/galatians/3_1-5.htm

:1 c ...that ye should not obey the truth,—

- Error shows disobedience. The Galatians simply were not obeying the truth. They were trying to become acceptable to God...
 - a. by undergoing the ritual of religion (circumcision, baptism, etc.) instead of trusting the death of Jesus Christ.
 - b. by subjecting themselves and focusing their lives upon the law instead of Christ.

${f 3:1d}$...before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

4. <u>Error leads a believer away from Christ</u>. The Galatians had clearly seen the death of Christ through the preaching of Paul. Paul's preaching had plainly pointed out and explained the death of Christ.

Therefore, they knew...

- a. that He had sent His Son into the world to die for them.
- b. that God expected all men to believe in the death of His Son, Jesus Christ.
- c. that God took their faith and love in His dear Son and accepted them because they believed and loved His Son.

How could they be so foolish and bewitched and not obey the truth—especially when they had clearly seen and understood the death of Jesus Christ? That is the question!

3:2 This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? — He's saying, I want to ascertain from your personal testimony, not from hearsay; it's always good to get a clear understanding. "...Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?"— When you received the Holy Spirit, was it by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? Did God give the Spirit and work miracles in their midst because they observed the law? Paul is stirring the Galatians to think! No, it was the result of their hearing the gospel and believing it. The present question strikes at the very heart of the gospel: How did you begin your Christian life? This is one thing every believer should know. Every person must hear the glorious message of faith. The message of faith is the gospel of salvation. The hearing of faith is the only way a person can ever become acceptable to God. A person must hear and believe the report in faith. All believers receive the Holy Spirit at the time of salvation. "Receive the Spirit" refers to the New Covenant work of the Holy Spirit that comes after saving faith, at the beginning of the Christian life, to sanctify and to empower the believer in life, and various kinds of ministry. Some people think that we need to work for the gift of the Holy Spirit, or earn this gift from God. But Jesus made it plain that all we have to do receive by faith.

3:3 Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?— Again, Paul asks, "Are you so foolish?" Is God so low that corruptible and dying men can achieve so much? Is man so exalted that he has so little to achieve in order to be perfected? Note the question: "Having begun your Christian life in the Spirit, are you now maturing and being made perfect by the flesh?" A believer does not become spiritually mature by focusing on...

- his efforts his works his goodness his discipline his morality his just behavior NO! No matter how strong and disciplined one's flesh is, it does not make him grow spiritually. It only causes him to focus upon himself. Spiritual growth only happens because God perfects him.
 - A man begins his journey to God when he truly believes in Jesus Christ, and is born again (spiritually).
 - A man continues his journey to God as he is daily renewed by the Holy Spirit (spiritually).



The word "perfect" (Gr epitele) certainly does not mean sinless, but complete, spiritual maturity. It was appears moment by moment while God is continually drawing our mind to spiritual things. Remember, the Spirit of God lives within the believer. He is there to work within the believer, and to help him grow and mature in Christ. "Christ is the Author and Finisher of our faith" (Heb.12:2a). What God begins, He finishes (Phil.1:6). Flesh is neither the Author nor Finisher.

3:4 Have ye suffered so many things in vain? If it be yet in vain. Because of their identification with Christ, they experienced many hardships. The point is this: If the Galatians now turned away from Christ to some false teaching, then the suffering they had borne for Christ would be in vain. They would have suffered for nothing. In fact, they would now appear foolish if they turned away from Christ when they had suffered so much in order to embrace Him. Every believer who truly turns to Christ has some suffering to bear. It may be sufferings of...

- separating from the world.
- denying self.
- taking up the cross—dying to one's own will and way every day.
- giving everything that one has to Christ and His cause (money, time, energy, effort).

The list can go on and on, but the point is clearly seen. If Christ is worth suffering for, why then forsake him and turn to some false teaching? Remember your old life, remember how Christ has changed you, and remember his forgiveness. Then stay true to Christ!

3:5 He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?— This is a rhetorical question; and a repetition of the argument in verse 2. By the word "HE," would certainly mean God, who had furnished or imparted to them the remarkable influences of the Holy Spirit. The Galatians knew they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, not when they obeyed the law. People are still insecure in their faith because faith alone seems too easy, and people still try to become close to God by following rules. By asking these questions, Paul hoped to get the Galatians to focus again on Christ as the center of their faith. What had occurred was that the Galatians had quickly turned from Paul's Good News to the teachings of the newest teachers in town. Often the Holy Sprit's greatest work in us is teaching us to persist, to keep on doing what is right even when it no longer seems new and interesting. If we get bored with the Christian life, we may not need the Spirit to stir us up— we may need him to settle us down, and get us to see the challenges of the ordinary. Paul has made his appeal or argument to the Galatians by showing them the error of their ways through their experiences:

- how the deception of error can cause them to react foolishly;
- how much their error deceives a person;
- how disobedient they were to the truth they already knew about being acceptable to God;
- and how their error led them far away from Christ.

He brought back to their remembrance of what it took to be acceptable to God—it was not by the works of the law or perfect flesh, but by the Spirit of God working in them by faith. His appeal was to point them; get them back on track, but he hadn't quit yet!

SUMMARY: GALATIANS 2:15-21

⁹The basis of salvation is the issue in this passage. Is salvation through Christ alone or does it come through



⁹ http://www.family-times.net/commentary/salvation-is-not-of-the-law/ http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html

Christ and adherence to the law? If observing the Jewish laws cannot justify us, why should we still obey the International Commandments and other Old Testament laws? Paul says we are Jews by birth, and are not like Gentiles. But we know that God accepts only those who have faith in Jesus Christ, whether we are Jews or Gentiles. No one can please God by simply obeying the law. So, we put our faith in Christ Jesus, and God accepted us because of our faith (2:15-16). As Paul will explain later in this letter, the law was given to reveal sin and not to redeem from sin (Rom. 3:20). Christ does not make us sinners (2:17). Paul's argument to Peter was that we did not find salvation through the law; we found it through faith in Christ. Furthermore, by going back into legalism, you are building up what you tore down (2:18). Paul is saying, "It was the law itself that killed me and faith, freed me from its power, so that I could live for God. (2:19). I have been nailed to the cross with Christ. I have died, but Christ lives in me (2:20). And I now live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. I don't turn my back on God's undeserved kindness (2: 21). If we can be acceptable to God by obeying the Law, it was useless for Christ to die." Believers today may still be in danger of acting as if Christ died for nothing (2:15-21)

APPLICATION:

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God has provided a way of salvation that depends on Jesus Christ and not my own efforts. Even though I know this truth, I must guard against the temptation of using service, good deeds, charitable giving, or any other effort as a substitute for faith. When we believe in the death of Jesus Christ to forgive our sins, we in effect destroy the law as a system of salvation. If we revert to the law, we rebuild it as a system of salvation. If we choose both the law and grace as systems of salvation, we restrict both of them.

SUMMARY: GALATIANS 3:1-5

¹⁰Paul tackled the tragedy of slipping into legalism. His first argument, recorded in these verses was an argument from experience. He asked them to look back at their own conversion: "Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the Law, or by hearing with faith?" They would have had to answer: "By the hearing of faith." Then Paul asks, "Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being perfected by the flesh?" In other words, both justification and sanctification (i.e. both salvation and spiritual growth) come by grace through faith, not by works. Every believer who truly turns to Christ has some suffering to bear. If Christ is worth suffering for, why then forsake Him and turn to some false teaching? The Galatians knew they received the Holy Spirit when they believed, not when they obeyed the law. Paul has made his appeal to the Galatians by showing them the error of their ways. He brought back to their remembrance of what it took to be acceptable to God—it was not by the works of the law or perfect flesh, but by the Spirit of God working in them by faith (3:1-5).

APPLICATION:

If you can see the ultimate test Christ went through you can ultimately trust Him with your life. There should never be "should I" or "If I" anymore. It's all been taken care of; already been foreseen; demonstrated, bound, gagged, and tied in a bow for us. The law does not determine our Salvation. It's just simple faith in the grace of God! Just knowing our justification came through Christ; frees us for all the promises and blessings He extends! Accept Christ by faith!



¹⁰ https://www.bereanbiblechurch.org/transcripts/galatians/3_6-9.htm http://www.pitwm.net/pitwm-versebyverse.html