

Galatians 2:11–21 — Leader / Learner Guide

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Big Idea and Context

Big idea: The gospel of grace governs how believers live together, not only how they are saved. Even Peter drifted under pressure, and Paul corrected him publicly with the truth of justification by faith alone.

This passage closes Paul's personal defense (ch. 1–2) and opens the doctrine of chapters 3–4. Verse 16 is the hinge of the whole letter.

- **Before this:** Peter learned at Cornelius's house that God makes no distinction (Acts 10), defended it in Jerusalem (Acts 11:17), and shook Paul's hand (Gal 2:9).
- **At Antioch:** when men came from James, Peter slowly withdrew from eating with Gentiles. The other Jews, and even Barnabas, followed.
- **Next (3:1–5):** "O foolish Galatians" — the same error is now troubling them.

Justified by Faith — Three Anchor Verses

Verse	What it says	Teaching point
2:16	Not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ	Said six ways in one verse: three times not by law, three times by faith. True for Jew and Gentile alike.
2:20	Crucified with Christ ... Christ lives in me ... I live by faith	Sanctification is by faith, just as salvation is.
2:21	If righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain	God would not have sent His Son if there were any other way.

Two kinds of righteousness: legal (forensic) — declared righteous before God, once for all; and practical — kept in daily fellowship through confession (1 John 1:8–10).

Public correction: Ryrie's rule — confession should be as public as the sin. Peter's example was public, so the correction was too.

Teaching Flow

1. **Paul Confronts Peter (11–14).** Public, pointed, and practical. Peter had been prepared (Acts 10), had preached it (Acts 11:17), and had promised it (Gal 2:9). His withdrawal was gradual, and it spread to the other Jews and even Barnabas.
2. **Paul Corrects Peter (15–16).** Jews and Gentiles differ by birth, but both are justified the same way: by faith in Christ, not by works of the law.
3. **Paul Concludes the Argument (17–21).** Rebuilding the law makes one a transgressor (17–18). The law led to Christ and died at the cross (19; Col 2:14; Gal 3:19). Paul is dead and alive (20). Grace is necessary, or Christ died for nothing (21).

Clarify While Teaching

- **"He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us":** this is 2 Corinthians 5:21, not verse 21 of this chapter.
- **"Baptized into His death":** this is Romans 6:3–4. 1 Corinthians 12:13 is the Spirit baptizing us into one body.
- **"These things I write ... that you may not sin":** this is 1 John 2:1.
- **Peter's error:** it was conduct under pressure, not a change in what he believed about salvation. Paul says they were "not straightforward about the truth of the gospel" (v.14).
- **Dates:** Sellers places the famine visit at A.D. 46 here but A.D. 48 in Study 1. Treat both as approximate.

Discussion and Close

1. Peter knew the truth, preached it, and promised it — and still drifted. What pressures pull you away from living what you know?
2. Even Barnabas was carried along. Who is watching your example right now?
3. Read 2:20 slowly. What does it mean for your ordinary day that Christ lives in you and you live by faith?

Close: Point ahead to 3:1–5: Paul turns from Peter to the Galatians — having begun in the Spirit, are they now trying to be perfected by the flesh? Salvation by faith, and life by faith.

Full study: [Peter Goes Back to School — Galatians 2:11–21](#) · Source: Dr. C. Norman Sellers, [SellersBibleInstitute.com](#)