



[Galatians 2:15-21](#)

(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. (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! (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. (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. (21) I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

New International Version

Verse 15 declares that being born an Israelite indicates a privileged birth. The privilege results from being part of the Old Covenant nation, thus having direct contact with God's Word, which contains His promises and instructions. This provides the possibility of [faith](#) because faith comes from hearing God's Word ([Romans 10:17](#)).

However, even having that privilege is of itself no benefit regarding justification. Why? Because a person is justified *only* through faith in [Jesus Christ](#). Through this means and this means only, a person is declared righteous or innocent of [sin](#). Thus, if one does not take advantage of its availability, the availability itself is of no value. Faith in Jesus Christ and His message is what is important about this way of life.

Paul makes a definitive statement regarding obedience following justification by faith in verses 17-18. The thing that he destroyed through faith and [repentance](#) was his former way of life with its mountain of sin accumulated during his unconverted life before justification. Paul was determined not to return to that sinful way. To do this, he had to live to [God](#) (verse 19), that is, to obey God's laws so that he would not sin and therefore bring to naught his justification through Christ's sacrifice. He is clearly stating that

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keeping God's laws is required, even though keeping them does not earn salvation.

We need to make sure that we understand this important reality: Being justified *is* a major step toward [salvation](#), but this does not mean that the person's character is now fully changed. It means only that the charges for sin against him are removed, and he is legally declared innocent on the basis of Christ's divine righteousness.

Justification is a judicial action by a judge—God. The term indicates an aligning of a forgiven person with a standard. In this case, the standard is the [law of God](#). Justification does not happen automatically to all but solely to those whom God calls, forgives, and unites with Christ because they believe in the efficacy of His death as the divinely given Substitute to pay the death penalty for their sins. They have humbled themselves before Him and fervently desire to glorify God through a vastly changed life.

Character is a group of qualities that cannot be transferred by fiat. It is created throughout life, either by experiences in [this world](#) or by experiences within a [relationship with God](#). We desire to be in the character [image of God](#). In His purpose, the creating of godly character takes place during the *sanctification* process.

The New International Version renders [Romans 10:17](#) as, "Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ." Paul uses "faith," one's belief, in the sense of trust. At the point of justification in a person's spiritual life, faith is not producing works; it is merely the mental activity of believing. The works come later as the sanctification process begins and continues. This faith, this trust, has its foundation in knowledge that God has supplied by enabling the called person to reach the right conclusion, a conclusion based in fact. His trust is therefore not blind; it is based, not on speculation, but truth.

In [Galatians 2:18](#), Paul shows that being justified by faith does not lead to a life of sin. Being justified by faith indicates a commitment in the mind of the justified to go forward, building on the relationship by being established with Christ. Verse 19 begins with the word "for," indicating the reason why the justified person will not return to the old way of life. By faith, Paul understands the reason: As far as the law is concerned, he is dead. His debt to it has been satisfied.

Verse 20 continues the thought. Like Christ died, the "old man," the carnal Paul, also died and was symbolically buried in the waters of [baptism](#). Also like Christ, he has been raised from the dead—symbolically—from the waters of baptism. This is done for the sole reason that, by means of the very faith of Christ that he has been given, he would live life as Christ lived. The life Christ lived was sinless. He did not break God's laws, and

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— John W. Ritenbaugh

To learn more, see:

[Living By Faith and God's Grace \(Part Two\)](#)

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