

Bible Study: Letters of Paul

Central Presbyterian Church

September 28, 2025

Session 4/16: “Galatians – Justification by Faith”

Readings: Galatians 2:15-21; 3:10-14

Historical and Cultural Context

- Written to the Roman province of Galatia
 - South Galatia (or, North Galatia, still debated)
 - (if South Galatia) Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derbe
- Jewish Christian missionaries (often called “Judaizers”) were urging Gentile believers to adopt Jewish practices, particularly circumcision and adherence to Mosaic Law, to be fully justified before God.
- Paul argues vehemently against this, emphasizing that justification comes through faith in Christ, not works of the Law.
- This controversy reflects tensions in the early church between Jewish and Gentile Christians and the question of how the gospel applies to both groups.

Overview

Galatians 2:15-21 is part of Paul’s defense of justification through faith in Christ alone, likely addressing Peter’s inconsistency at Antioch (2:11-14) and articulating the doctrine of justification by faith. Galatians 3:10-14 expands on this, using the Old Testament to argue that reliance on the Law brings a curse, while faith in Christ brings redemption and the promise of the Spirit.

Exegesis of Galatians 2:15-21

Text (Lexham English Bible Translation for Reference)

15 We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles, 16 but knowing that a person is not justified by the works of the law, if not by faith in Jesus Christ, and we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law [no human being will be justified]. 17 But if while seeking to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also have been found to be sinners, then is Christ an agent of sin? May it never be! 18 For if I build up again these things which I destroyed, I show myself to be a transgressor.

19 For through the law I died to the law, in order that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ, 20 and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me, and that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not declare invalid the grace of God, for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

Verse 15: “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles” (Ἡμεῖς φύσει Ἰουδαῖοι καὶ οὐκ ἐξ ἐθνῶν ἁμαρτωλοί,)

-Context: Paul begins by addressing Jewish Christians (“we”), distinguishing them from Gentiles, who were often stereotyped by Jews as “sinners” due to their lack of adherence to the Mosaic Law.

Greek Terms:

Ἰουδαῖοι φύσει (Ioudaioi physei): “Jews by birth/nature.” The term *φύσις* (physis) refers to one’s natural state or origin, emphasizing ethnic identity. In the first century, Jewish identity was tied to birth, circumcision, and adherence to the Law.

ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἐξ ἐθνῶν (hamartōloi ex ethnōn): “sinful Gentiles.” ἁμαρτωλοί (hamartōloi) literally means “sinners” (from *ἁμαρτάνω*, “to miss the mark”). In Jewish contexts, Gentiles were often labeled as sinners because they did not follow the Torah (cf. Psalm 1:1; Luke 6:32-33). ἐθνῶν (ethnōn) refers to non-Jewish nations or peoples, a common term for Gentiles in both Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts.

See Appendix 1 for a fuller discussion of ἁμαρτωλοί

Verse 16: “but knowing that a person is not justified by the works of the law, if not by faith in Jesus Christ...” (εἰδότες δὲ ὅτι οὐ δικαιοῦται ἄνθρωπος ἐξ ἔργων νόμου ἐὰν μὴ διὰ πίστεως Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ...)

Context: Paul articulates the core of his teaching: justification comes through faith, not adherence to the Mosaic Law. This is a direct challenge to the Judaizers’ teaching.

Greek Terms:

δικαιόω (dikaioō): “Justified.” In Koine Greek, this verb means to declare righteous or to acquit. In Jewish contexts, it often carried a forensic sense (being declared

righteous before God, as in a courtroom). Paul uses it to describe God's act of making believers righteous through faith.

ἔργα νόμου (erga nomou): "Works of the law." This phrase refers to actions prescribed by the Mosaic Law (e.g., circumcision, Sabbath observance, dietary laws). In Second Temple Judaism, "works of the law" were seen as markers of covenant identity, but Paul argues they cannot justify.

πίστις Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (pistis Iēsou Christou): "Faith in Jesus Christ" or possibly "the faithfulness of Jesus Christ." The genitive construction is debated. The objective genitive ("faith **in** Christ") is traditional, meaning trust in Jesus. The subjective genitive ("faithfulness **of** Christ") suggests Jesus' fidelity to God's plan (e.g., his obedience unto death). Both interpretations were plausible in the first century; the objective genitive aligns with Paul's emphasis on human faith (cf. Gal 3:22).

οὐδεὶς (oudeis): "No one." Emphatic in Greek, underscoring the universal scope of Paul's claim: no human, Jew or Gentile, can be justified by law-keeping.

Verse 17: "But if while seeking to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also have been found to be sinners, then is Christ an agent of sin? May it never be!" (εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ εὐρέθημεν καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτωλοί, ἄρα Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας διάκονος; μὴ γένοιτο.)

Context: Paul addresses a potential objection: if Jews, by abandoning reliance on the Law, are counted as "sinners" like Gentiles, does this make Christ a promoter of sin? Paul rejects this outright (μὴ γένοιτο· "may it never be!").

Greek Terms:

ἁμαρτωλοί (hamartōloi): "Sinners," again referring to those outside the Law's boundaries. (See Appendix 1 for a fuller discussion of this word)

διάκονος ἁμαρτίας (diakonos hamartias): "Promoter/minister of sin." διάκονος (diakonos) means "servant" or "agent." The objection implies that Christ's gospel, by nullifying the Law, encourages sin—a charge Paul refutes.

Verse 18: "For if I build up again these things which I destroyed, I show myself to be a transgressor." (εἰ γὰρ ἃ κατέλυσα ταῦτα πάλιν οἰκοδομῶ, παραβάτην ἑμαυτὸν συνιστάνω.)

Context: Paul argues that returning to the Law after embracing faith in Christ would make him a true transgressor (*παραβάτης*, parabatēs), as it would deny the sufficiency of Christ’s work.

Greek Terms:

παραβάτης (parabatēs): “Lawbreaker” or “transgressor.” In Greek, it denotes someone who steps over a boundary or violates a rule, often used in legal contexts (cf. James 2:11).

Verse 19a: “For through the law I died to the law, in order that I might live to God.” (ἐγὼ γὰρ διὰ νόμου νόμῳ ἀπέθανον ἵνα θεῷ ζήσω)

Context: Paul explains his personal transformation: the Law itself revealed his inability to achieve righteousness, leading him to “die” to its claims and live for God through Christ.

Greek Terms:

ἀποθνήσκω τῷ νόμῳ (apothnēskō tō nomō): “I died to the law.” The dative *τῷ νόμῳ* indicates separation—Paul is no longer under the Law’s authority. This “death” likely refers to his realization that the Law cannot justify, fulfilled through Christ’s death (v. 20).

ζήσω τῷ θεῷ (zēsō tō theō): “Live for God.” The verb *ζάω* (zaō) means to live physically or spiritually. Here, it denotes a new life oriented toward God’s purposes.

Verse 19b-20a: “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me...” (Χριστῷ συνεσταύρωμαι· ζῶ δὲ οὐκέτι ἐγώ, ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός·)

- **Context**: This is one of Paul’s most profound statements, describing union with Christ. Believers share in Christ’s crucifixion, dying to their old self and living by Christ’s indwelling presence through faith. See Appendix 2 for a fuller discussion of the phrase “I have been crucified with Christ)

Greek Terms:

συσταυρώ (systauroō): “Crucified with.” A rare compound verb, emphasizing co-participation in Christ’s death (cf. Rom 6:6). In the first century, crucifixion was a vivid image of shame and death, making Paul’s use striking.

ζῇ δὲ ἐν ἐμοὶ Χριστός (zē de en emoi Christos): “Christ lives in me.” The verb ζάω (zaō) and preposition ἐν (en) suggest Christ’s active, transformative presence within the believer.

Verse 20b “that life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (ὁ δὲ νῦν ζῶ ἐν σαρκί, ἐν πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ ἀγαπήσαντός με καὶ παραδόντος ἑαυτὸν ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ.)

Greek terms:

πίστει ζῶ τῇ τοῦ υἱοῦ τοῦ θεοῦ (pistei zō tē tou huiou tou theou): “I live by faith in the Son of God.” The dative *τῇ πίστει* could again mean “by faith in” or “by the faithfulness of” the Son of God. The title “Son of God” underscores Jesus’ divine status and unique relationship with the Father, common in early Christian theology (cf. Rom 1:4).

Verse 21: “I do not declare invalid the grace of God, for if righteousness is through the law, then Christ died to no purpose.” (οὐκ ἄθετῶ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ· εἰ γὰρ διὰ νόμου δικαιοσύνη, ἄρα Χριστὸς ὥρην ἀπέθανεν.)

Context: Paul concludes by emphasizing that relying on the Law nullifies God’s grace and renders Christ’s death meaningless.

Greek Terms:

ἄθετέω (atheteō): “Set aside” or “nullify.” In Koine Greek, it means to reject or invalidate something (cf. Mark 7:9). Paul insists he does not reject God’s grace (*χάρις*, charis), which is God’s unmerited favor.

δικαιοσύνη (dikaiosynē): “Righteousness.” This term, related to *dikaioō*, refers to the state of being right with God. Paul argues that this cannot be achieved through the Law but only through Christ’s death.

ὥρην (dōrean): “For nothing” or “in vain.” In Greek, it implies something done without purpose or effect, heightening the stakes of Paul’s argument.

Theological Significance:

- Paul establishes justification by faith as the core of the gospel, applicable to both Jews and Gentiles. The Law reveals sin but cannot justify, as it demands perfect obedience, which no one can achieve.
- The concept of “dying to the Law” and being “crucified with Christ” reflects a radical reorientation of identity, from Law-based righteousness to union with Christ.
- Paul’s emphasis on grace (charis) counters any notion that salvation can be earned, aligning with the Greco-Roman concept of grace as unmerited favor but grounding it in Christ’s redemptive work.

Exegesis of Galatians 3:10-14

Text (Lexham English Translation for Reference):

10 For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse, for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things that are written in the book of the law to do them.” 11 Now it is clear that no one is justified in the sight of God by the law, because “the one who is righteous will live by faith.” 12 But the law is not from faith, but “the one who does these things will live by them.” 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by* becoming a curse for us, because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,” 14 in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

Verse 10a: “For as many as are of the works of the law are under a curse...” (Ὅσοι γὰρ ἐξ ἔργων νόμου εἰσὶν ὑπὸ κατάραν εἰσὶν)

Context: Paul cites Deuteronomy 27:26 to argue that reliance on the Law brings a curse because no one can perfectly obey it. This challenges the Judaizers’ claim that Law-observance is necessary for salvation.

Greek Terms:

ὑπὸ κατάραν (hypo kataran): “Under a curse.” Κατάρα (katara) refers to a divine curse or condemnation, common in Jewish texts for those who violate God’s covenant (cf. Deut 27:26 LXX). In Greco-Roman contexts, katara could denote a curse or imprecation.

ἔργα νόμου (erga nomou): “Works of the law,” as in 2:16, referring to Torah observance.

Verse 10b: “for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things that are written in the book of the law to do them.’” (γέγραπται γὰρ ὅτι Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὃς οὐκ ἐμμένει πᾶσιν τοῖς γεγραμμένοις ἐν τῷ βιβλίῳ τοῦ νόμου τοῦ ποιῆσαι αὐτά.)

πάντα τὰ γεγραμμένα (panta ta gegrammena): “Everything written.” The Greek emphasizes the totality of the Law’s demands, reinforcing that partial obedience is insufficient.

Verse 11: “Now it is clear that no one is justified in the sight of God by the law, because ‘the one who is righteous will live by faith.’” (ὅτι δὲ ἐν νόμῳ οὐδεὶς δικαιοῦται παρὰ τῷ θεῷ δῆλον, ὅτι Ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται.)

Context: Paul quotes Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX) to contrast faith with Law-reliance. The “righteous” are those justified by faith, not works.

Greek Terms:

δῆλον (dēlon): “Clearly.” An emphatic term meaning “evident” or “obvious,” signaling Paul’s confidence in his argument.

ὁ δίκαιος ἐκ πίστεως ζήσεται (ho dikaios ek pisteōs zēsetai): “The righteous will live by faith.” This is a direct quote from Habakkuk 2:4 (LXX). *Δίκαιος* (dikaios) means “righteous” or “just,” and *ἐκ πίστεως* (ek pisteōs) indicates the source or means of righteousness—faith. In Jewish tradition, Habakkuk 2:4 was understood as faithfulness to God; Paul reinterprets it to emphasize faith in Christ.

Verse 12: “But the law is not from faith, but ‘the one who does these things will live by them.’” (ὁ δὲ νόμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐκ πίστεως, ἀλλ’ Ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς.)

Context: Paul cites Leviticus 18:5 to show that the Law operates on a principle of doing, not believing, creating a contrast with faith-based righteousness.

Greek Terms:

ὁ ποιήσας αὐτὰ (ho poiēsas auta): “The one who does them.” The verb ποιέω (poieō) means “to do” or “perform,” emphasizing action. In Leviticus 18:5, life is promised to

those who obey the Law, but Paul argues this is impossible due to human sinfulness.

ζήσεται ἐν αὐτοῖς (zēsetai en autois): “Will live by them.” The preposition ἐν (en) suggests living in accordance with the Law’s commands, but Paul implies this is unattainable.

Verse 13a: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...” (Χριστὸς ἡμᾶς ἐξηγόρασεν ἐκ τῆς κατάρας τοῦ νόμου γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα)

Context: Paul explains Christ’s redemptive work, citing Deuteronomy 21:23 to show that Jesus took on the curse of the Law through his crucifixion, freeing believers from its condemnation.

Greek Terms:

ἐξηγόρασεν (exēgorasen): “Redeemed.” From *ἐξαγοράζω* (exagorazō), meaning to buy back or ransom, often used in Greco-Roman contexts for freeing slaves or captives. Here, it denotes Christ’s act of liberating believers from the Law’s curse.

κατάρα (katara): “Curse,” as in v. 10.

γενόμενος ὑπὲρ ἡμῶν κατάρα (genomenos hyper hēmōn katara): “Becoming a curse for us.” Γίνομαι* (ginomai) means “to become,” and ὑπὲρ (hyper) indicates substitution (“on behalf of”).

Verse 13b: “because it is written, “Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree,” (ὅτι γέγραπται· Ἐπικατάρατος πᾶς ὁ κρεμáμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου,)

Greek Terms:

Jesus’ crucifixion (*κρεμáμενος ἐπὶ ξύλου*, “hung on a tree/pole”) fulfills Deuteronomy 21:23, where hanging signifies divine cursing.

Verse 14a: in order that the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles in Christ Jesus (ἵνα εἰς τὰ ἔθνη ἡ εὐλογία τοῦ Ἀβραάμ γένηται ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ)

Context: Paul connects Christ's redemption to God's promise to Abraham (Gen 12:3), extending the blessing to Gentiles through faith and granting the Spirit as the sign of the new covenant.

Greek Terms:

εὐλογία (eulogia): "Blessing." In Jewish contexts, it refers to God's favour or covenant promises, here linked to Abraham's blessing for all nations.

Verse 14b: "so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith." (ἵνα τὴν ἐπαγγελίαν τοῦ πνεύματος λάβωμεν διὰ τῆς πίστεως.)

ἐπαγγελία τοῦ πνεύματος (epangelia tou pneumatos): "Promise of the Spirit."

Ἐπαγγελία (epangelia) means a divine pledge, and *πνεῦμα* (pneuma) refers to the Holy Spirit, the eschatological gift promised in Joel 2:28-29 and fulfilled in Christ.

Theological Significance:

- Paul uses the Old Testament to argue that the Law brings a curse due to human inability to obey it perfectly, while Christ's death absorbs this curse, offering redemption.
- The contrast between "works of the law" and "faith" underscores two mutually exclusive paths to righteousness. Faith aligns with God's promise to Abraham, fulfilled in Christ and extended to Gentiles.
- The gift of the Spirit marks believers as part of the new covenant, fulfilling God's promise to Abraham and demonstrating the inclusivity of the gospel.

Key Themes and Synthesis

- Justification by Faith: Both passages emphasize that righteousness comes through faith in Christ, not adherence to the Mosaic Law. The Greek term *dikaioō* and its cognates highlight a forensic declaration of righteousness, rooted in God's grace.
- Union with Christ: Galatians 2:20's imagery of being "crucified with Christ" and Christ living "in me" reflects a mystical and transformative union, a concept resonant with early Christian theology but radical in its implications for identity.

- The Law's Role: The Law reveals sin and pronounces a curse (3:10, 13), but it cannot justify. Paul's use of **erga nomou** critiques reliance on Jewish identity markers, a significant issue in the mixed Jewish-Gentile churches.
- Redemption and the Spirit: Christ's redemptive act (3:13-14) fulfills God's promise to Abraham, making salvation available to all through faith and marking believers with the Spirit as the new covenant's sign.

Application to the Galatian Context

Paul's audience, primarily Gentile Christians, faced pressure to adopt Jewish practices to secure their standing before God. Paul's exegesis of the Old Testament and his emphasis on faith countered this, affirming that Gentiles are full members of God's covenant through Christ. For Jewish Christians, Paul's argument challenged their reliance on ethnic and legal privilege, urging unity in Christ.

Conclusion

Galatians 2:15-21 and 3:10-14 form a theological cornerstone of Paul's teachings, emphasizing justification by faith, the sufficiency of Christ's death, and the inclusion of Gentiles in God's promise. The Greek terms—**dikaioō**, **pistis**, **erga nomou**, **katara**, and **exēgorasen**—carry rich meanings rooted in Jewish and Greco-Roman contexts, underscoring Paul's argument that salvation is by grace through faith, not works. These passages remain foundational for understanding Christian soteriology and the universal scope of the gospel.

Appendix

ἁμαρτωλοί

The Greek word ἁμαρτωλοί (hamartōloi), found in Galatians 2:15 and elsewhere in the New Testament, is a key term in Paul's theology, often translated as "sinners." Below is a detailed analysis of its etymology, tracing its roots, development, and usage in the context of Koine Greek and the first-century Greco-Roman and Jewish world.

Etymology of ἁμαρτωλοί

Root and Formation:

- ἁμαρτωλοί is the nominative plural form of the adjective ****ἁμαρτωλός**** (hamartōlos), meaning "sinful" or "a sinner." It derives from the verb ****ἁμαρτάνω**** (hamartanō), which means "to sin," "to miss the mark," or "to err."
- The verb ἁμαρτάνω is composed of:
 - ἄ- (ha-): A negative prefix, often implying privation or deviation, related to the alpha privative in Greek (similar to "un-" or "non-" in English).
 - μαρτ- or μερ- (mart-/mer-): A root possibly related to the idea of "aiming" or "targeting," though its precise origin is debated. Some scholars suggest a connection to the Indo-European root *mer-, meaning "to fail" or "to go astray."
 - The suffix -τάνω (-tanō) is a common verb-forming suffix in Greek, indicating action.
- The adjective ἁμαρτωλός is formed by adding the suffix -ωλός (-ōlos), which denotes a quality or characteristic, transforming the verb into an adjective describing someone characterized by the act of sinning.

Semantic Development:

- In Classical Greek (5th–4th century BCE), ἁμαρτάνω primarily meant "to miss the mark" in a literal or metaphorical sense, such as failing to hit a target in archery or making an error in judgment. For example, in Homer's Iliad (8.311), it could describe missing a physical target, while in philosophical texts, it might refer to moral or intellectual failure (e.g., Plato, *Apology* 31d).
- By the Hellenistic period (3rd century BCE–1st century CE), ἁμαρτάνω increasingly took on moral and religious connotations, especially in Jewish Greek texts like the Septuagint (LXX), where it translated Hebrew terms like חָטָא (ḥāṭā'), meaning "to sin" against God or violate His covenant (e.g., Exod 20:20; Deut 9:16).

- The adjective ἁμαρτωλός, derived from ἁμαρτάνω, thus described someone who habitually sins or is characterized by sin. In the plural (ἁμαρτωλοί), it often refers to a group identified as sinners, especially in a religious or moral sense.

Usage in the Septuagint (LXX):

- In the LXX, ἁμαρτωλός frequently translates Hebrew terms like רָשָׁע (rāšāʿ, “wicked”) or חַטָּא (ḥaṭṭāʾ, “sinner”), referring to those who violate God’s law or are morally corrupt (e.g., Ps 1:1, “the way of sinners”; Isa 1:4, “a sinful nation”).
- The term often carried a communal or covenantal sense, distinguishing those within Israel who were faithful from those who were not, or contrasting Israel with the sinful nations (Gentiles).

Usage in the New Testament and Paul’s Context:

- In the New Testament, ἁμαρτωλοί appears 47 times, often in contexts influenced by the LXX. It denotes those who are morally or spiritually wayward, particularly in relation to God’s standards.
- In Galatians 2:15, Paul uses ἁμαρτωλοί to describe Gentiles (“sinful Gentiles”), reflecting a Jewish perspective that viewed Gentiles as sinners because they did not follow the Mosaic Law (cf. Ps 9:17; Tobit 13:6). This usage aligns with first-century Jewish stereotypes of Gentiles as inherently outside the covenant, though Paul subverts this by arguing that both Jews and Gentiles are justified by faith, not Law (Gal 2:16).
- The term’s flexibility in Koine Greek allowed Paul to use it both descriptively (as a label for those outside God’s covenant) and theologically (to emphasize universal sinfulness, as in Rom 3:23, where all have sinned, (ἥμαρτον).

Cultural and Linguistic Context:

- In the Greco-Roman world, ἁμαρτάνω and its derivatives were less common in religious contexts but could describe errors or failures in civic or moral duties (e.g., failing to honor a deity or breaking a social norm). The term’s moral weight in the New Testament is heavily influenced by Jewish theology rather than Greco-Roman usage.
- In first-century Judaism, ἁμαρτωλός was a loaded term, often used by groups like the Pharisees to describe those who did not strictly observe the Law (e.g., tax collectors and prostitutes, Luke 7:37; 15:1-2). Paul’s use in Galatians reflects this

Jewish background but reorients it to argue that all are sinners apart from Christ's redemption.

Related Terms:

- ἁμαρτία (hamartia): The noun form, meaning “sin” or “sinful act,” appears frequently in Paul’s writings (e.g., Rom 5:12; Gal 3:22). It shares the same root and emphasizes the act or state of sinning.
- παράπτωμα (paraptōma): Another term for “sin” or “transgression,” used by Paul to describe specific violations (e.g., Rom 5:15), distinct but related to ἁμαρτία.
- The interplay of these terms in Paul’s theology highlights sin as both an act (ἁμαρτάνω) and a state (ἁμαρτωλός), underscoring humanity’s need for divine grace.

Summary

The Greek word **ἁμαρτωλοί** derives from the verb **ἁμαρτάνω**, meaning “to miss the mark” or “to err,” with roots in the negative prefix ***ἀ-** and a possible Indo-European root ***mer-** (to fail). Originally denoting a literal or metaphorical failure in Classical Greek, it gained moral and religious significance in the LXX and New Testament, particularly in Jewish contexts where it described those who violated God’s law or covenant. In Galatians 2:15, Paul uses **ἁμαρτωλοί** to reflect a Jewish view of Gentiles as “sinners” outside the Law, but his broader argument redefines sinfulness as a universal condition remedied only by faith in Christ. The term’s etymology and usage reveal its flexibility, bridging Greco-Roman notions of error with Jewish theological concepts of covenantal unfaithfulness.

Appendix 2

συσταυρόω Χριστῷ

The phrase **“crucified with Christ”** in **Galatians 2:20** (Greek: **συσταυρόω Χριστῷ**, **systauroō Christō**) is a theologically rich expression in Paul’s letter to the Galatians, encapsulating key aspects of his soteriology and understanding of Christian identity. Below is a detailed analysis of the phrase, exploring its etymology, grammatical structure, theological significance, historical and cultural context, and its implications in the first-

century Greco-Roman and Jewish world, as well as its role within the broader argument of Galatians.

Etymology and Linguistic Analysis

Greek Text: The phrase in Galatians 2:20 is **συσταυρόω Χριστῷ** (systauroō Christō), translated as “I have been crucified with Christ” in most English versions.

- Components of συσταυρόω (systauroō):
 - Root:
 - Derived from **σταυρόω** (stauroō), meaning “to crucify,” which itself comes from σταυρός (stauros), meaning “cross” or “stake.”
 - In Classical and Koine Greek, stauros referred to an upright pole or cross used for execution, a common and brutal form of punishment in the Greco-Roman world.
 - Prefix:
 - The prefix συν- (syn-) means “with” or “together with,” indicating a shared or joint action.
 - In compound verbs, syn- often emphasizes participation or association (e.g., συγκληρονόμος, “co-heir” in Rom 8:17).
- Morphology:
 - Systauroō is a perfect passive indicative verb, first person singular (συνεσταύρωμαι, synestaurōmai), meaning “I have been crucified with.”
 - The perfect tense in Greek denotes a completed action with ongoing effects, suggesting that the believer’s co-crucifixion with Christ is a definitive past event with continuing significance.
 - Χριστῷ (Christō): The dative case of Χριστός (Christos), meaning “Christ” or “Messiah.” The dative indicates association or accompaniment, reinforcing the idea of being crucified “with” or “in relation to” Christ.
- Etymology of Key Terms:
 - Σταυρός (stauros): Originally a simple stake or pole, by the first century CE, it commonly referred to the Roman cross, a symbol of execution, shame, and suffering (cf. Cicero, Verrines 2.5.165; Josephus, *Jewish War* 5.11.1).
 - In Jewish contexts, crucifixion was associated with divine cursing, as seen in Deuteronomy 21:23 (“cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree”), which Paul cites in Galatians 3:13.

- Συν- (syn-): This prefix was widely used in Koine Greek to denote unity or joint participation, aligning with Paul's theology of union with Christ (e.g., "in Christ" phrases in Rom 6:3-8; Eph 1:3-4)
- Rarity:
 - The verb *systauroō* is rare in Greek literature, appearing only twice in the New Testament (Gal 2:20; Rom 6:6).
 - Its scarcity underscores its deliberate and striking use by Paul to convey a profound spiritual reality.
- Grammatical and Syntactic Role
 - Perfect Tense: The use of the perfect passive (συνεσταύρωμαι) emphasizes that the believer's co-crucifixion is a completed act (accomplished through Christ's historical crucifixion) with ongoing effects (the believer's transformed life).
 - The passive voice suggests that this is an act done to the believer by God, not
- Dative Construction
 - Χριστῷ (with Christ) indicates a close association, implying that the believer's crucifixion is not independent but integrally linked to Christ's crucifixion.
 - This reflects Paul's theology of participation in Christ's death and resurrection (cf. Rom 6:4-6).
- Context in the Sentence:
 - The phrase is part of a larger statement: "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."
 - The structure contrasts the believer's death to the old self (via co-crucifixion) with the new life empowered by Christ's indwelling presence, highlighting a transformative union.

Theological Significance

The phrase "crucified with Christ" is central to Paul's theology in Galatians and carries several key implications:

- Union with Christ:

- The phrase encapsulates the idea of believers being united with Christ in his death. This union is not merely symbolic but transformative, signifying that believers share in the effects of Christ's crucifixion—namely, the death of the old, sinful self and liberation from the power of sin (cf. Rom 6:6, “our old self was crucified with him”).
- In Galatians, this union counters the Judaizers' emphasis on the Law by showing that true righteousness comes through identification with Christ, not adherence to Mosaic regulations.
- Death to the Law:
 - In the immediate context (Gal 2:19), Paul states, “For through the law I died to the law, in order that I might live to God.” The phrase “crucified with Christ” explains how this death occurs: through participation in Christ's crucifixion, believers are released from the Law's authority and its condemnation (cf. Gal 3:13).
 - The Law, which reveals sin but cannot justify, is fulfilled and transcended in Christ's death.
- New Identity:
 - The phrase marks a radical redefinition of identity. By being “crucified with Christ,” Paul no longer lives as his former self (bound by sin or Law) but as one in whom “Christ lives” (Gal 2:20b).
 - This reflects a shift from self-reliance to dependence on Christ's indwelling presence, a concept resonant with first-century Christian mysticism (cf. Col 1:27).
- Substitution and Redemption:
 - The phrase connects to the broader theme of Christ's substitutionary death.
 - In Galatians 3:13, Paul explains that Christ “became a curse for us,” redeeming believers from the Law's curse.
 - “Crucified with Christ” implies that believers participate in this redemptive act, experiencing its benefits through faith.

Historical and Cultural Context

Greco-Roman Context:

- Crucifixion was a gruesome and humiliating form of execution reserved for slaves, rebels, and non-citizens in the Roman world (cf. Tacitus, Annals 15.44). It was a

public spectacle meant to deter rebellion and shame the victim. Paul's use of crucifixion imagery would have been shocking to Gentile audiences, as it transformed a symbol of disgrace into one of divine victory and identification with Christ.

- The prefix syn- resonated with Greco-Roman concepts of communal participation (e.g., in mystery religions, where initiates shared in the deity's experiences). However, Paul's use is distinctly Christian, rooted in the historical event of Jesus' crucifixion and its theological significance.

Jewish Context:

- In Jewish thought, crucifixion was associated with divine cursing due to Deuteronomy 21:23 (cf. Gal 3:13). Paul's audience, including Jewish Christians, would have understood "crucified with Christ" as a bold claim: Christ's cursed death on the cross becomes the means of redemption, and believers' participation in that death frees them from the Law's curse.
- The phrase challenges Jewish reliance on the Law as a marker of covenant identity, asserting that faith in Christ, not Law-observance, defines God's people.

Galatian Context:

- In Galatians, Paul addresses a crisis caused by Judaizers who urged Gentile Christians to adopt circumcision and the Mosaic Law to be justified.
- The phrase "crucified with Christ" serves as a rhetorical and theological counterpoint, emphasizing that salvation and identity come through union with Christ's death, not through legal observance.
- This was particularly relevant for Gentile believers, who were being pressured to become "Jewish" to be fully accepted in the covenant community.

Role in Galatians' Argument

Galatians 2:15-21:

- The phrase appears in a passage where Paul defends justification by faith against reliance on "works of the law" (Gal 2:16).

- Following his confrontation with Peter (2:11-14), Paul uses “crucified with Christ” to illustrate how believers—both Jews and Gentiles—are made righteous through faith, not Law. The phrase underscores that the old distinctions (Jew vs. Gentile, Law-keeper vs. sinner) are nullified in Christ’s death.
- It also personalizes Paul’s argument: by saying “I have been crucified with Christ,” Paul models the universal applicability of this truth, inviting his readers to see themselves in the same position.

Connection to Galatians 3:10-14:

- The theme of co-crucifixion ties directly to Galatians 3:13, where Christ’s death redeems believers from the Law’s curse.
- The phrase “crucified with Christ” in 2:20 anticipates this, showing how believers participate in that redemption.
- The result is the “blessing of Abraham” extended to Gentiles and the gift of the Spirit through faith (3:14).

Broader New Testament Parallels

- Romans 6:6-8: Paul uses **systauroō** again in Romans 6:6 (“our old self was crucified with him”) to describe the believer’s death to sin through union with Christ’s crucifixion. This parallel reinforces the idea that co-crucifixion liberates believers from sin’s dominion.
- Colossians 2:20; 3:3: Paul speaks of believers having “died with Christ” to the world’s principles, echoing the transformative death implied in Galatians 2:20.
- Philippians 3:10-11: Paul’s desire to “know Christ and the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings” reflects a similar participatory theology, though without the specific verb *systauroō*.

Implications and Application

Theological Implications:

- The phrase encapsulates the paradox of the gospel: life comes through death, and honour through shame. By sharing in Christ’s crucifixion, believers experience both

death to their old self (sin, Law, worldly identity) and new life through Christ's indwelling presence.

- It emphasizes the sufficiency of Christ's work, countering any notion that additional works (e.g., circumcision) are needed for salvation.

For the Galatians:

- The phrase reassured Gentile believers that they are fully included in God's covenant through faith, without needing to adopt Jewish practices.
- For Jewish Christians, it challenged reliance on ethnic or legal privilege, pointing to Christ as the sole basis for righteousness.

Contemporary Relevance:

- The phrase invites modern Christians to view their identity as rooted in Christ's death and resurrection, calling for a life of faith and dependence on God's grace rather than self-effort or external markers of righteousness.

Summary

The phrase "crucified with Christ" (συσταυρόω Χριστῷ) in Galatians 2:20 is a powerful theological statement that combines linguistic precision with profound spiritual truth. Etymologically, it draws on the imagery of crucifixion (stauros), a symbol of shame transformed into victory, and the prefix syn- to emphasize participation with Christ. Grammatically, the perfect passive tense underscores a definitive act with ongoing effects. Theologically, it encapsulates Paul's doctrine of justification by faith, union with Christ, and liberation from the Law's curse. In the context of Galatians, it counters the Judaizers' legalism, affirming that all believers—Jew and Gentile—are made righteous through faith in Christ's redemptive death. The phrase remains a cornerstone of Pauline theology, inviting believers to embrace a new identity defined by Christ's cross.