



360 DISCUSSION 02.05.17

THE BEGINNING, MIDDLE & END

GALATIANS 2:15-21



An ancient Arabic proverb reminds us, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step.” While that may be true, it is also true that a journey of a thousand miles takes a lot more than a single step. The first step is important, but so is the next step and the step after that. The most rewarding of all is the final step.

Nothing is more tragic than to begin well, only to end poorly.

That is Paul’s concern with the believers in Galatia, while they had taken the all important first step in their relationship with Christ, they had taken a tragic misstep along the way and were in danger of losing their way altogether.

Paul is not only concerned with how they began their journey, he is equally concerned with how they continue the journey. He anxiously chides them, “Are you so foolish? After beginning with the Spirit, are you now finishing by the flesh (3:3)?”

In Galatians 2: 15-21, Paul reminds us of how we begin our journey in Christ, and how having begun well, we continue in him.

BEGINNING WITH CHRIST (vv. 15-18)

One of the most important words in Paul's vocabulary is "justified." The question Paul is addressing is how one will be declared righteous at the final judgement. In Paul's mind, we can either be justified by our works or by faith in Christ. "Does the Christian life begin with what we do for Christ, or by placing our full confidence in what Christ has done for us?"

VERSES 15-18: We are Jews by birth and not "Gentile sinners,"¹⁶ and yet because we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we ourselves have believed in Christ Jesus. This was so that we might 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 we ourselves are also found to be "sinners" while seeking to be justified by Christ, is Christ then a promoter of sin? Absolutely not!¹⁸ If I rebuild those things that I tore down, I show myself to be a lawbreaker.

1. What advantage might one have if they were raised in the Jewish faith rather than as a "Gentile Sinner"?
2. How might that advantage quickly become a disadvantage?
3. How does the Law place Jew and Gentile on equal footing?
4. Why is it impossible to be justified by works of the Law?
5. How would you define "faith in Christ?"
6. How does beginning in Christ by faith and attempting to continue in Christ by works rebuild what has been tore down?
7. What are some other ways we rebuild what we have torn down?

CONTINUING IN CHRIST (vv. 19-21)

I am sure Paul's opponents would have agreed that faith in Christ is an all important first step, but they would have come into sharp contrast with Paul on how one continues in Christ. They would have said, "We continue in Christ by works of the Law." In the end, we will be declared righteous because we trust in Christ and keep the Law. Their formula was "Faith in Christ + Works of the Law." Paul's formula was "Faith in Christ + Continuing Faith in Christ."

VERSES 19-21: 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 now 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 comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

1. How could the Law lead one to die to the Law?
2. In what sense are we crucified with Christ?
3. In what sense does Christ live in us?
4. What does it mean to "live by faith in the Son of God"?
5. Why is it important for us to remember that Christ "loved" us and "gave himself" for us?
6. How do we set aside the grace of God, by trying to complete our faith through our own works?
7. One might say, "we begin in Christ by trusting the initial work of Christ," and that, "we continue in Christ by trusting the continuing work of Christ," and "we are completed in Christ by the final work of Christ."
 - a. How would you describe the initial work of Christ?
 - b. How would you describe the continuing work of Christ?
 - c. How would you describe the final work of Christ?
 - d. What role does faith play in every phase of the Christian life?
 - e. How do we know when we are relying on our own works rather than the work Christ has done, is doing and will do in us?
8. What are some of the ways you most often set aside the grace of God?
9. What are some steps you can take to embrace God's grace in the days, weeks, months and years to come?