

## Galatians 2:11-21

**Why did Paul oppose Peter to his face (vv. 11-12)?** Peter was being hypocritical. Peter at first "used to eat" meals with the Christians at Antioch, who were both Jews and "Gentiles," welcoming them into the church without bringing them under the Law of Moses, until some Jewish visitors came from Jerusalem (Acts 11:3). These were the Judaizers, legalistic Jews who claimed to be Christians, who held that circumcision was necessary to be a Christian. When they arrived, Peter backed off associating with the Gentile Christians because he knew the Gentiles were not circumcised and he feared confrontation with the Judaizers.

Application: It is easy to criticize Peter; but every person knows what it means to do something that you know is wrong. Most of us know what it feels like when *social pressure* pushes you toward compromise in some way.

**How did Peter's action affect the other Jews (v. 13)?** The rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him. Peter first made the compromise of acting as if the Gentile Christians were not Christians at all. Barnabas followed him. Then the rest of the Jews at the church in Antioch, like falling dominoes, followed Peter and Barnabas.

Application: This shows what a heavy responsibility it is to be a leader. When we go astray, others will often follow. Satan knew that if he could make Peter take the wrong path, then others would follow him.

**How would you describe Paul's confrontational message (v.14)?** This wasn't an issue of seating at the church potluck. Paul saw the issue for what it was; it was about the truth of the gospel. Because this was a *public affront* to the Gentile Christians and because it was a *public denial* of the truth of the gospel, Paul confronted Peter in a *public* way. This issue was as much a threat to Gentile liberty as the infiltration of the Judaizers (v. 4).

As hard as this was, Paul did it because *he knew what was at stake*. This wasn't a matter of personal conduct or just personal sin on Peter's part. If that were the case it is unlikely that Paul would have first used such a public approach. This was a matter about the truth of the gospel; proclaiming, "This is how a man is right before God."

**What did Paul remind them of (vv. 15-16)?** "*You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew.*" Paul reminded Peter that *he himself did not live under strict obedience to the Law of Moses*. "Peter, you eat bacon and ham and lobster. You don't keep a kosher diet. Yet now, before these false teachers, you act as if you keep these laws all the time."

Paul reminded Peter that they are justified before God by the work of Jesus, not by their keeping of the law. The law told people what to do but gave them no power to do it. It was given to reveal sin, not to be a savior.

God does not justify people (declare them righteous) because they keep the Mosaic Law.<sup>1</sup> To say that you have to add anything to faith in Christ absolutely mutilates the gospel.

**What did Paul clarify and emphasize (vv. 17-18)?** Paul refuted the charge of the Judaizers that since justification by faith eliminated the Law, it encouraged sinful living/lawless behavior. They hypothesized that a person could believe in Christ for salvation and then do as he pleased, having no need to do good works. Paul hotly denied the charge especially noting that this would make Christ the promoter of sin. One the contrary, if a believer would return to the Law after trusting Christ alone for salvation, the Law would only demonstrate the he was a sinner, a lawbreaker, since no one can keep the Law perfectly. These verses are a strong testimony that Christians are free from the requirements of the Mosaic Law.<sup>2</sup>

These Judaizers 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 were sinning worse than ever.

Justification is the favorable verdict of God, the righteous Judge, that one who formerly stood condemned has now been granted a new status at the bar of divine justice. To be justified means to be declared righteous before God, that is, to enjoy a status or standing of being in a right relationship with God, of being accepted by him.<sup>3</sup>

**How is it a sin to rebuild a way to God through the Law of Moses (v. 18)?** 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." This is a great insult to the Son of God. The Bible is very clear – Salvation is not by works (Ephesians 2:8-9) and there is only one way to God and that is through Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

This is the great tragedy of legalism. In trying to be *more* right with God, legalists 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).

**What did Paul describe (vv. 19-20)?** He described his permanently changed relationship to the Law. A dead person is unresponsive to external stimuli. Paul said that he had died to the Law. If he was dead to the Law, then it was impossible for the Law to be the way by which he stood accepted by God.

Notice that it wasn't the Law that was dead. The Law reflects, in its context, the holy heart and character of God. There was nothing wrong with the Law. It wasn't the Law that died, but Paul died to the Law.

**How did Paul die to the Law?** The Law itself "killed" Paul. It showed him that he never could live up to the Law and fulfill its holy standard. For a long time before Paul knew Jesus, he thought God would accept him because of his law-keeping. But then he came to the point where he really understood the Law -- and that was when Paul realized that the Law made him *guilty* before God, not *justified* before God. This sense of guilt before God "killed" Paul and made him see that keeping the Law wasn't the answer. The Law could never produce a holy life; God never intended that it should. His way of holiness is explained in v. 20.<sup>4</sup> The Law killed him, freeing him up to be joined to another.....to live for God.

**The Christian has died to the Law; he has nothing more to do with it. Does this mean that the believer is at liberty to break the Ten Commandments all he wants?** No, he lives a holy life not through fear of the Law but out of love to the One who died for him. Christians who desire to be under the Law do not realize that this places them under the curse of the Law. The only way we can live to God is by being dead to the Law.

Paul realized that on the cross, a great exchange occurred. He gave Jesus his old, try-to-be-right-before-God-by-the-Law life, and it was crucified on the cross. Then Jesus gave Paul His life – Christ came to live in him. So, Paul's life wasn't his own anymore, it belonged to Jesus Christ!

v. 20 When a person trusts Christ, God identifies him or her with Christ. The believer did what Christ did. When Christ died, I died. When Christ arose from the grave, I arose to newness of life. My old self-centered life died when I died with Christ. His Spirit-directed life began in me when I arose with Christ. Therefore, in this sense, the Christian's life is really the life of Christ ("Christ lives in me").<sup>5</sup>

Paul's reference to "the flesh" here is literal. It means our physical bodies.

**What did Paul have to say about the issue of law-righteousness (v. 21)?** Paul concluded by affirming that he did "not set aside (nullify) the grace of God," as Peter had done by his behavior. Peter had nullified God's grace by implying that it was not enough. He did this by putting himself back under the Law, saying in effect that obedience must accompany grace to make it sufficient. If that were true, Paul ended, "then Christ died needlessly." It would then be obedience that saves, not Christ.<sup>6</sup>

The grace of God is seen in His unconditional gift of salvation. When man tries to earn it, he is making it void. It is no longer by grace if man deserves it or earns it. If Peter could obtain favor with God by Jewish observances then Christ died for nothing; He literally threw His life away. Christ died because man could not obtain righteousness in any other way --- not even by Law keeping.<sup>7</sup>

"If my salvation was so difficult to accomplish that it necessitated the death of Christ, then all my works, all the righteousness of the Law, are good for nothing. How can I buy for a penny what cost a million dollars?" (Luther)

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Galatians, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 29

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. p. 31

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 30

<sup>4</sup> Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, 1995 Edition, (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 1880

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, Notes on Galatians, 2017 Edition (published by <http://planobiblechapel.org/soniclight/>), p. 33

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p. 34

<sup>7</sup> Believer's Bible Commentary, William MacDonald, 1995 Edition, (published by Thomas Nelson Publishers), p. 1880