

Galatians

Chapter 2:15 - 21

December 18, 1994

- **Galatians 2:15-21**

After publicly rebuking Peter for having withdrawn from eating with the Gentiles, Paul goes on to provide understanding about the law. We are unsure where Paul's account of his confrontation with Peter ends and his instruction to the churches of Galatia begins, but in either case the instruction is very applicable.

15 "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

- Paul's primary argument is this; if the Jews, who had always enjoyed the privilege of being near to God and had received the very oracles of God, yet the Law was unable to save them, why then would we impose such requirements upon those who didn't have the advantages that the Jews had? This is precisely the heresy that Peter's actions were proclaiming and why Paul calls his actions hypocrisy. Or another way: If the Jews could not be saved by the law but only through faith in Christ, why would we expect the Gentiles to obey the law in order to be saved?
- There is a fairly common misunderstanding in the Church today that says that in the Old Testament God required a strict obedience to the law in order to be saved, but in the New testament God changed things and decided to have people be saved by grace. The belief that righteousness was obtained through the law was Jewish heresy. The Jews had created a righteousness of their own (Romans 10:3) as a replacement for the righteousness of God which Paul says has always been by faith through Christ. The means of salvation has never changed; sinners, whether Jew or Gentile, have always been saved by grace through faith. Believing Jews understood this point but the heretical unbelieving Jews did not.
- Note that Paul says that a man *cannot* be justified by the law. To be justified means to be given a new legal standing before the law or being declared not guilty. It is a legal term which means that the law does not stand in condemnation of the sinner. Those who will attempt to stand before the judgment seat confident in their own righteousness will fall. However, a man *can* be justified by faith in Christ. Here is a corollary: Condemnation is an act of man and salvation is an act of God. Judgment is brought upon a man by himself and justification is a gift of God. Note the differences between a wage and a gift in Romans 6:23.
- In these churches in Galatia, there were Jews who had ceased trying to obtain their own righteousness and had rested in the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ. They had been students of Paul and had been instructed on these issues. But subsequently, Gentiles were saved and the Judaizers came in to say that these Gentiles must conform to the Law. As a result, many of the Galatians fell into heresy.

17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

- If a natural Jew is under the curse of the law and later is justified by faith in Christ, should he then seek to keep his justification by keeping the law? Is this the way of Christ? Did Christ save us by faith so as to further our sin of self justification? If our self righteousness was torn down by Christ through grace why do we try to build it back up again?
- The righteousness of Christ which we stand in before God, is not a license to sin. It does not give us the freedom to sin it gives us the freedom from sin. Paul's argument here is much the same as the one found in Romans 6:1.

18 "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

- If a man is justified by faith and is removed from the penalty of the law (justification) and then seeks to rebuild the curse of the law through seeking righteousness from obedience to the law, he makes himself into one who is again cursed under the law. A

man either lives by the law (thereby being cursed) or lives by grace through faith. There is no middle ground.

19 "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

- This is a somewhat difficult verse to understand. I believe what Paul is saying is that when he came to a proper understanding of the law (post conversion) he died to trying to live by the law. He died to its curse. He did not abolish or destroy the law. As Christians we do not seek to remove the law but rather Jesus removed the curse of the law.
- In the modern Christian church there is another common misunderstanding; the law was harsh, strict, and bad and now I am saved by grace. The law is *righteous*. The law is *good*. (Romans 7:7-12) We must get this through our heads. The thing that is wrong is thinking that we can be righteous by observing it. There is nothing in the law that is contrary to our Christianity. Remember how Christ said the whole law is summed up in two commands: Love the Lord your God with all of your heart, mind, soul and strength, and Love your neighbor as you love yourself? Is there anything non or anti Christian about these laws? No. The problem exists in the heresy that teaches that righteousness comes through obedience to the law.

20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

- Paul is identified with Christ in his death. Like Paul, all believers are crucified with Christ. There is another common misunderstanding in the Church that says that Christ died so that I could live. He paid the price and therefore I go free. But that is not at all what the bible teaches us. We were represented by Christ just as we were represented by Adam when he sinned. In both cases we died; in Adam we died because death spread through sin. (Romans 5:12). In Christ we died with Him in his crucifixion. The difference is that Christ rose again and we were included with Him in His resurrection. We cannot be included with Him in His resurrection if we were not united with Him in His death. Christ did not die so that we might live; He died so that we might die and He lives so that we might live.
- Note that Paul's life is lived out through Christ. Paul's eternal life is eternal because it is the life of Christ. Just as we were united with Him in His death so too we are united with Him in His life. Because Christ will live forever, we too will live forever.
- The Christian *life* is lived by faith. The Christian life is not begun by faith and then later through self righteousness. The Christian life is lived by faith from first to last.
- Notice that Christ loved Paul and he substituted His life for Paul. The death of Christ was not for some unknown group of people but rather was particularly for Paul and the elect.

21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." (NKJV)

- Paul does not set aside the law nor does he set aside the grace of God. The law of God and the grace of God are not inconsistent. What *is* inconsistent is thinking that we can be righteous by observing the law while living under grace. This makes no sense.
- If it was possible for you to obtain justification through the law then there was no need for Christ to die. But remember that in the garden Christ asked if there was any other way to accomplish the justification of the elect other than His death. But there was no other way. The only way that the elect receive justification is because Christ died.