

But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. –Gal. 2:14-19

Paul goes to the very heart of the Gospel of Christ in this passage. Peter and the men from Jerusalem were living a pretense, not walking according to the truth of the gospel. Peter lived like a Gentile until certain men had come from James in Jerusalem, upon which he separated himself from those who were not circumcised, and refused to eat with them, to have the most common Christian fellowship. Eat, does not mean the Lord's Supper here, but means to dine, to have fellowship. Peter did not treat them as equals, but along with Barnabas, put a wall between him and those who were not circumcised

As I said before, Paul's rebuke is of the sternest order. Let me paraphrase:

”Peter, you live like a Gentile, and do not follow the Law of Moses. I know that, you know that, the whole world knows that. So you are not acting honestly, but are putting on a pretense for the sake of the people from Jerusalem. You are acting from fear, not from faith. All of us Jews who have come to believe the Gospel know that the law could not save us. We believed in Jesus Christ simply because we knew that there was no real righteousness that could be achieved by the law. So why are you compelling the Gentiles to do what you do not do yourself?”

That “why” was a powerful question. “Peter, Peter, Peter, WHY are you doing this?” There was only one answer to the question, and that Peter was afraid of the Jews who had come from Jerusalem. I am sure that Peter had what appeared to him to be good reason: how could the church prosper in Antioch if they offended the people at Jerusalem. These people had come from James, from the great ones in Jerusalem. Peter did not want to have a fuss with them. So he did what appeared to be relatively harmless—certainly the Gentile Christians in Antioch would be able to understand how important it was for there to be peace with James and Jerusalem.

Peace is a very important thing to have in the church of Jesus Christ. We are commanded to seek peace with all men, not to be quarrelsome, not to be turbulent and contentious. Peace is so valuable that we must be willing to purchase it at a very great price. The fruit of righteousness grows in peace and those who disturb the peace of families, churches, and nations are hated of God. The Lord counts those who sow discord between brethren as abominable and He abhors them.

But peace is not the highest value. It must not be purchased at the price of betrayal of the very truth of the Gospel That was what was at stake here. If the action of Peter and Barnabas was allowed to stand, the very truth of the Gospel would be over thrown and the wall of separation between Jew and Gentile would be built up again. There would be two kinds of Christians in the church, those weak ones who were not circumcised and the truly righteous ones who were circumcised. But let us look at the words of verses 16-19

I. The Jew in Christ.

We have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. Vs. 16

“We” is the same “we” as in verse 15: Those who were Jews by nature, those who had been separated by Moses unto the law of God. There was a great difference between the Jew and the Gentile. There is no question that the Israelites had been separated unto God and the Gospel. They had received the promises and the covenants, and there were many outward differences between the Jew and the Gentile. The Jews knew whom they worshipped, and their laws were given by God Himself from Mount Sinai, and their temple and their sacrifices, the Sabbaths, and their ceremonies had been prescribed by God himself. The heathen were sunk in idolatry and vices too terrible to mention. Paul uses the description that Jews would have been familiar with and expresses it as they would have expressed it: Jews were not sinners like the Gentiles were.

But these Jews were not like other Jews: they had come to Christ. Why had they come to Christ? To find true righteousness, for they realized that by the works of the law no flesh could be justified. Paul is not talking about ceremonies, because the Jew could do the ceremonies and they did them very well. The unrest in the heart of the Jew that caused him to come to Christ was not caused by failure to observe ceremonies.

II. Christ as the minister of sin? Verses seventeen and eighteen can be taken two ways:

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

- A. It can mean, Is Christ less than a complete Savior? Will we be betrayed by coming to Christ and not find the true complete righteousness that we seek? This would be such an abhorrent thought to Paul that immediately rejects it. But I don't think that is what he means here, considering the context.
- B. Better: In coming to Christ, we Jews are found on the same level as Gentiles, and every advantage that we experienced as shut up to God under the law is taken away. Is there no advantage, then, to being a Jew? Is Christ the minister of sin because we are found sinners, worse off than we were before we came to Christ? As Jews we had a special, favored position before God. Has Christ taken that away and left us miserable sinners just like the Gentile dogs? Is this what Messiah came to do, to take away the advantage of the Jew? This idea Paul rejects with the greatest abhorrence.
- C. If I am found a sinner, it is not Christ who is to blame; I have made myself a sinner.
 - a. Build again: build again that wall of separation between Jew and Gentile—If I try to claim benefits under Moses then there is no hope for me, for all the condemnation of the law rises in my face again. I have nullified the very reason for coming to Christ to begin with.
 - b. Paul rejects all advantage that the law might give: hear his own words in Philippians 3:1-11, which is a commentary on Galatians 2:16-19
1 Finally, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe. 2 Beware of dogs,

beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. 3 For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh. 4 Though I might also have confidence in the flesh, I more: 5 Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; 6 Concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless. 7 But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. 8 Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, 9 And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: 10 That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; 11 If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

The fault was in seeking to derive any favor with God—any of the smallest amount of righteousness from the keeping of the law. Paul rejected such favor entirely.

Beloved, in the great desire to regain union with Rome, many people in evangelical circles today are retreating from the Reformed doctrine of Justification by Faith and are seeking to make works some part of our justification before God. Let us beware: if such great men as Peter and Barnabas and James could be carried away by the subtlety of the devil, how much more are we weak and susceptible to this. Paul states the truth with the greatest of clarity in verse 19, which we now look at.

III. The nature of the law with respect to Justification

For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. Vs. 19

- A. When I try to keep the law—and I mean the Ten Commandments—there are four different effects that they have upon me. This is without exception, and is true of every human being upon this earth with respect to the Ten Commandments. John said it clearly, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” I John 1:8. Because we cannot perfectly keep the Ten Commandments, those who seek to be justified by them end up in one of these following conditions:
1. Rebellion, where we abandon all attempts, give up, and turn away from God and the Bible, as being unrealistic and unreasonable. There are a great many people in this condition.
 2. Despair, where the result is the same. We give up. We may not be opening rebellious, but we simply despair of being good enough, and drop out of diligence in church and Christian living. There are a great many people in this condition.
 3. Hypocrisy. We do outward things and profess great love for the law, but do not tell the truth and admit the truth concerning our condition. We may justify ourselves by saying, “But at least I am trying.” But before the law, effort is not good enough, for

it is not those who try to keep the law, not those who profess great regard for the law, but those who keep the law.

4. Repentance: If you cannot love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, and with your entire mind, then you must fly to Jesus Christ. Run to Christ as fast as you can go—lay hold on Him; call upon Him; confess your weakness, your rebellion, your despair, and, yes, your hypocrisy. This way the law will have done its good work, driving you away from yourself to Jesus Christ.
- B. Rebellion, Despair, Hypocrisy—these things are spiritual death and ruin. This is what Paul means when he says, “By the law I am dead to the Law.” The law is good, but I am a sinner, and the end result of the perfect work of the law in me is to drive me to condemnation and ruin—whether of rebellion, despair, or hypocrisy, or combinations of all three.
- C. Paul’s concern: The message that Peter, Barnabas, and perhaps James, were sending is that it is not enough to believe in Christ. The law had to be added. Circumcision was a symbol of that. If baptized believing Gentiles were not clean enough for Jews to eat with, then faith in Christ was in vain. Paul rejected this idea with great vehemence, and so must we.

Beloved: if your response to what you perceive to be a good enough life has been one of rebellion, despair or hypocrisy, the problem is not with Christ, it is because you do not understand the Gospel. Let me state the Gospel in the most unmistakable terms, not in my words, but in the words of Christ Himself:

John 3:17 For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved. 18 He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

May God bless you.