

Gospel, Faith and Freedom (Studies in Galatians)

Justified by Faith, not Ego

Galatians 2:11-21

Behind the controversies Paul engages here, and that reoccur constantly, is the question, 'How can I justify myself?' Without Christ and the gospel, this is probably the major motivator of our behaviour.

Justification, by faith in Christ, and not 'works of the law' now comes to the fore. But the beginning of this passage talks about Peter succumbing to peer pressure, and the end has Paul saying '...it is no longer I who live...', so we have the alternatives—ego, or faith in Christ.

- When Paul deals with the law in Romans, he says Jews no longer have reason to boast in it (Rom. 2:17, 23; 3:27; 4:2; cf. 15:17).
- 'Works of the law' is linked with 'flesh' in 3:2-3; cf. 6:12-13.

How we live has an impact on other people, so Peter's capitulation affects how the gospel comes across to others (vv. 11-14). Paul has been straightforward about 'the truth of the gospel' in Jerusalem (v. 5) and expects Peter to be so in Antioch (v. 14).

- Parents, leaders and older Christians need to represent the power and liberty of the gospel in life so the gospel is preserved for another generation.

Peter is hypocritical and condemned—a serious matter.

- Jesus himself taught Peter to 'live like a Gentile' (v. 14) when he offered him unclean food to eat (Acts 10:15, 28-29). In Gentile company, he was happy to live this way.
- Peter has effectively 'demolished' the law (v. 18) with regard to being justified. He knows Jewish taboos and ceremony are not definitive for his relationship with God.
- He also knows, from his own track record, that having God's law does nothing to make him righteous. He has burned his bridges and trusted in Christ.
- By withdrawing from non-circumcised Christians, he effectively said they were not clean—he was calling unclean what God had cleansed. The gospel had 'not worked'.
- The wonder of being cleansed by Christ's offering must not be tampered with.
- Peter affected other Jews and thereby 'forced' these Christians to also be Jews.
- Hypocrisy is never far away—in this case, saying we trust in Christ to be justified but allowing our life to be controlled by fear of others.
- Not living in line with the gospel, in this case, adding some requirement to it, actually changes the message of the gospel for others.

What lies at the heart of this false attachment to law (vv. 15-17)?

- This is a 'we' section—Paul stating what is agreed, concluding with a 'but if'.
 - The 'but if' tells us where he is heading in his argument.
- Jews, apart from Christ, think 'sinner' describes Gentiles, not themselves (cf. Luke 18:11).
 - The same can be true for Christians whose security is based in church tradition or practice and not in Christ.
- All Christians know this is not true—they have turned to Christ to be justified and cannot rely on what they do—works of the law.
 - Belief in Christ is contrasted with 'works of the law'—you can't trust both.
 - They are freed from all they could not be freed from by Mosaic law (Acts 13:39).
- Here is the question—has Christ 'increased sin' by showing that Jews are sinners in need of repentance?

- This may be what the ‘false brothers’ are saying.
- In fact, Christ, and the preaching of his gospel, expose the charade of righteousness built up by law keeping. (Cf. Rom. 2:21-24.)
- The letter will continue to deal with people who want to be under law (4:21).
- The world, and human nature, don’t like to be exposed and think that law will be able to keep a lid on what is wrong.

Paul can think of worse things than this: nullifying the grace of God (vv. 18-21).

- This is an ‘I’ section, Paul using himself as an example.
 - He avoids putting himself above his readers.
 - The experience of knowing Christ is, for him, everything!
 - Cf. Phil. 3:8.
- I dismantled all reliance on law and trusted in Christ.
 - He ‘blew his career’ as a Pharisee!
 - Works of the law are linked to ‘flesh’ (3:3) and in Paul’s case, these works of the flesh had been apparent—especially envy.
- If I re-erect this, that is what would prove I am a sinner.
 - By saying Christ wasted his time dying for my sins.
 - Sin against grace is more serious than sin against law (Heb. 2:1-4).
- I had to die to the law to live to God—even though God revealed himself through the law! This terminus to law must be emphatic if we want to know God.
 - Paul asked who the ‘Lord’ was when met by Christ. He didn’t know God.
- I died (to the law) in Christ’s crucifixion.
 - ‘Knowledge of God comes when God happens to us, when God does himself to us. We are crucified with Christ’ (Forde “Being a Theologian of the Cross” p. 90).
- Christ lives in me. The ‘I’ that matters to me now is Christ and who he is and what he does.
- Every day, I live by faith in him who loved me and gave himself up for me (cf. Rom. 8:32). I am constrained by love (2 Cor. 5:14).
- I am not going to nullify the grace of God by living as though this didn’t happen. And, by implication, he is saying, ‘I’ll do everything I can to persuade you not to either.’

Here is the true ‘I’ (Gr. *ego*) that God intended from the beginning—a man or woman in Christ and Christ in that person. The cross settles the matter of the old ‘I’ and Christ present, active and indwelling is enough for the present ‘I’.

- Eugene Peterson renders 2:20a as, ‘I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me (*The Message*).
- Martin Luther writes, "Here he plainly showeth by what means he liveth; and he teacheth what true Christian righteousness is, namely, that righteousness whereby Christ liveth in us, and not that which is in our person. And here Christ and my conscience must become one body, so that nothing remains in my sight but Christ crucified and raised from the dead. But if I behold myself only, and set Christ aside, I am gone' (*Galatians*, p. 169).