

## 10. Peter's compromise with legalism Gal 2:11-18

◇ *11 When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.*

Paul found it necessary to oppose even Peter, the reputed chief of the apostles, for giving in to pressure from the legalism of “the circumcision group”. Peter’s compromise threatened the very core of the gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Even Barnabas - the main leader of the church in Antioch was led astray!

**QUESTION: who and what was this “circumcision group?”** These were Jews who professed salvation in Jesus Christ, but who also still held onto the Jewish Laws & rituals. They said one has to earn a place with God by doing good, keeping the Law and going through religious ceremonies such as circumcision. They said

- ⇒ “grace” is not sufficient
- ⇒ the death of Christ on the cross is not enough
- ⇒ it is not enough to put one’s faith in the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation
- ⇒ God does not save just by grace through faith in Jesus ... God saves by grace through faith PLUS our self-efforts of works, keeping the law & the Jewish traditions

They said Paul’s Gospel was an “easy-believe” gospel ... that Paul had watered down the Gospel ... They taught that people who had only trusted in Christ for salvation were deficient ... not “full Christians” ... and to become full Christians they needed to start keeping the law & traditions.

◇ *12 Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.*

What was the issue here? A clue is provided in Acts 10:28 “you know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company with or go to one of another nation” (i.e. a Gentile).

There was actually no direct command in the Mosaic law forbidding Jews to associate with those of other nations.... but it was the tradition & general practice of the Jews to separate themselves in everyday life from uncircumcised persons. They did not eat at the same table as Gentiles, for they regarded them as unclean. [Notice how Peter was accused in Acts 11:2-3 because he had gone into the house of Cornelius, a Gentile. Peter defended his actions by explaining that through the vision God gave him at Simon the Tanner’s house (Acts 10), God said Gentiles were not unclean, and that God accepted them in coming to believe the Gospel!]

In Antioch, Jewish and Gentile Christians fellowshiped together at mealtimes without regard to Jewish dietary laws or traditions. Peter felt free to eat with the Gentiles, and did so on a regular basis. While it lasted, this was a beautiful demonstration of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ.

But then some Jewish believers arrived from Jerusalem and were upset that Peter was not following Jewish customs. Peter was intimidated & influenced by pressure from them, and slowly began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles. By doing so, Peter was in effect acting as if there were two separate groups of Christians- Jewish Christians who were superior/ better, and Gentile Christians who were inferior/ lesser!! He was denying one of the great truths of the gospel—that all believers are one in Christ Jesus, no matter what their race, nationality, colour or language!

*Cf. Galatians 3:26-28 "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

- ◇ *14 When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"*

Paul recognised the seriousness of the situation - the truth of the Gospel was at stake ... the truth that on the basis of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, all peoples who believe - Jews and Gentiles - are accepted equally by God.

Cf. Acts 11:18 "When they heard these things they became silent; and they glorified God, saying, "Then God has also granted to the Gentiles repentance to life."

Peter himself had acknowledged that in Acts 15:7-12 "And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. (8) So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, (9) and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. (10) Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they." (12) Then all the multitude kept silent and listened to Barnabas and Paul declaring how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles."

In others words, on the basis of Jesus' death and resurrection, all peoples who believe - Jews and Gentiles - are accepted equally by God.

But suddenly in Antioch, Peter's actions implied that observances of Jewish laws and customs was necessary for holiness, and that the Gentile believers should have to live as Jews, under the Jewish laws & traditions, or be "second-class citizens" regarded as inferior and less spiritual!

This was hypocrisy because Peter himself no longer lived under the Jewish law! He understood the freedom from the law that he had in Christ. In this sense, he 'lived as a Gentile' no longer under the demands of the Jewish laws & traditions. So there was no sense in now suddenly telling the Gentile Christians they had follow the Jewish customs!

- ◇ *Galatians 2:15-16 "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 uses irony here. "We Jewish Christians - including you (Peter & Barnabas) & I - have realized that a person is not made acceptable to God by keeping the law... so we have put our faith in Jesus and we do not trust the law anymore ... Why then are you telling Gentile Christians they need to keep the Jewish laws & traditions?? That makes no sense!

Paul reiterates a foundational truth in vs 16: “a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ” Most of the world’s religions are based on saving yourself through good works & following laws & traditions. In contrast, the teaching of the NT is absolutely unique & distinct ... “a man is **not** justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.”

### **What does “justified” mean?**

The word justified is used 3 times in verse 16. It is a legal term, borrowed from the law courts and means "to declare righteous" in the sense of pronouncing him innocent of all charges against him. The verdict is “NOT GUILTY” .... the person is pronounced innocent, cleared of all guilt & declared to be righteous. (The opposite of justify is "to condemn" by finding one guilty-as-charged.)

Since people are condemned sinners and God is holy, how can people be justified? Negatively, man is not justified by observing the Law and not by works, but positively, justification is by faith in Jesus Christ

The Bible reveals to us that we are ALL unrighteous. Our best attempts to be righteous are inadequate & fall short of God’s standards. In fact our righteousness is viewed as ‘filthy rags’ (Isa 64:6) in God’s sight, therefore we are completely unacceptable to God! There is NOTHING we can do to remedy the problem.

But the good news of the Gospel is that a person can be declared righteous by God, by faith in Jesus Christ on the basis of who Jesus is & the redemption which He bought for us at Calvary. (Rom 3:24-25).

Justification is different from "pardon" ... a pardoned criminal still has a record. When God justifies a sinner, his past sins are remembered against him no more !

Justification is an act of God; it is not the result of man's character or works. "It is God that justifies" (Rom 8:33).

God justifies sinners, not "good people." Paul declares that God justifies "the ungodly" (Rom 4:5). The reason most sinners are not justified is because they will not admit they are sinners! And sinners are the only kind of people Jesus Christ came to save (Matt 9:12-13 ).

Justification is not a process - it is an instant and immediate transaction between the believing sinner and God. If we were justified by works, then it would have to be a gradual process. No Christian is "more justified" than another Christian - every Christian is equally justified, because we are “justified by faith in Christ” .... Not only am I forgiven & my guilt removed, but I am also ‘clothed’ in the righteousness of Christ ...His perfections are credited to my personal spiritual account! Christ Himself is my righteousness - I am viewed as righteous before God because I am ‘in Christ!’

Cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21                      “God made Jesus Christ to be sin for us so that we could be made the righteousness of God in him! Praise the Lord!”

Verses 17-21 are very important for understanding what it actually means to be saved and justified by faith in Jesus. It is no superficial, “easy-believe” message! Paul goes on to explain that to be “saved by faith in Jesus Christ” is NOT **merely** having a profession of faith or saying that you believe in Jesus, or just agreeing with facts about Jesus ...

Lets see if we can come to an understanding of what Paul says here in the rest of Gal 2 ...

- ◇ *Gal 2:17 "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."*

This is a difficult verse in interpret, but one way of understanding that has been helpful to me, is to see the statement, "*But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin?*" as a question which he anticipated the legalists asking ... they accused Paul's gospel of encouraging 'loose living' because it did not emphasize the keeping of the law. **They said, if Pauls' gospel encourages Christians to not keep the law, then he is guilty of implying that Christ promotes sinful living!**

Paul answers with a very strong 'NO!' In case anyone thinks Paul is preaching a shallow gospel, he lays out what it really means to be "saved by faith." In verses 18 -21, he explains that actually, those justified by faith in Christ have a far higher & deeper motivation to live holy lives ... they are not merely trying to fulfil a duty to obey the external law! Believers are set free from self-effort ... indeed they have died to self! ... they now have an internal power for holy living which is the risen Lord Jesus Christ living His life in & through them!

- ◇ *Gal 2:18 "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."*

The word "For" indicates that there is a connection is with the verse before : "God forbid that anyone should think that Christ is a promoter of sin!" If someone goes back from trusting Christ to keeping the Law, he makes himself a transgressor by returning to a hopeless system of self effort by which no man can be justified in God's sight ... he is condemning himself by placing himself under the curse of the law! The law condemned to death those who failed to obey it perfectly.

By coming to Christ, I was freed from the burdensome obligation of the Mosaic law. If I now go back from Christ to Moses, I am recreating trust in the works of the law ... but by trying to keep the law I actually prove how sinful I am, because I cannot keep the law perfectly.... I am a transgressor ... a law-breaker!

To claim that to live the Christian life, we must please God by laws, traditions, washings, circumcision, etc, is to claim that Christ is not enough ... that His work is not sufficient... but my works & efforts can complete what is lacking!!! Such a view is proud, arrogant, self-centered, and all about 'confidence in me!'

Paul's point is that we have to abandon all hope, trust & reliance on ourselves or on anything that we can do - in fact, we need to 'die' to trusting in our ability to keep the law. Gal 2:19 "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God." ... we will look at this in our next session.