

Paul's Correction of Peter

Sermon Delivered on May 1st, 2022
AM Service

By: Pastor Greg Hocson

Text:

Galatians 2:14 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? 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 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. 17: 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. 18: For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19: For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

Introduction

We saw last time the very difficult and awkward situation Paul was in when **he had to call Peter out** because he was clearly making a great mistake. If you remember the occasion, Peter was in Antioch and **he was enjoying fellowship and eating with the Gentiles**, but when the Judaizers who insisted that circumcision is necessary for salvation, when they arrived, **Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentile believers**. Peter's action was sending a wrong message to both Gentile and Jewish believers. By his action, he is **implying that Gentiles must become a Jew and obey Jewish customs** in order to be truly saved. Peter was compromising the purity of the gospel and **what's worse, he was influencing the other Jewish believers and even Barnabas**. And so, Paul felt it was necessary to confront Peter publicly, **to remind them of the truth of the gospel and of the freedom they have in Christ**. Martin Luther stresses the danger of Peter's action regarding the truth of the Gospel, *"Peter did not say so, but his example said quite plainly that the observance of the Law must be added to faith in Christ, if men are to be saved. From Peter's example the Gentiles could not help but draw the conclusion that the Law was necessary unto salvation."*

This morning let's consider [verses 14-19](#) in three headings, namely, Paul **Rebukes** Peter, Paul **Reviews** the Gospel, and Paul **Responds** to Objections.

I - Paul Rebukes Peter

And so, as soon as he saw that they were not walking according to the truth of the gospel, **Paul confronted Peter publicly by exposing his inconsistency** with the gospel. As Paul rehearses the event, he said in [Galatians 2:14](#), *"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?"

He asked Peter, *"If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, why are you now trying to make the Gentiles to live like Jews?"* **Paul reminds Peter that he was exercising and enjoying his freedom** in Christ by eating with Gentiles and eating their food. But when the Judaizers, the party of circumcision came, he withdrew and separated himself. Though he did not say it, **by his action, Peter is implying** that if men are to be saved, the observance of the Law must be added. Peter was acting as if Gentiles must become like Jews and submit to the party of circumcision.

Then Paul goes on to say in the verses 15-16:

Galatians 2:15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

We, that is, Paul himself, Peter, Barnabas, and the other Jewish believers, were born Jews. They are Jews by birth, not 'sinners' like the Gentiles. By this, Paul is not saying that they being Jews were not 'sinners.' He was just highlighting that **as Jews they had privileges that Gentiles do not have**. In *Romans 3:1-2*, Paul tells us that advantage of the Jews over the Gentiles, *"What advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision? Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God."* Also in *Romans 9:4*, we read these words, *"Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises."* So, when Paul wrote, *"We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,"* he is simply saying that **Jews are not sinners like Gentiles in terms of privilege and advantage**. That being Jews, they have the advantage of being born into the nation of the chosen people of God. They have been blessed with the oracles of God, the Law, and the sacrificial systems, thus **have greater opportunities to be saved and welcomed by God**. They are not like **Gentiles who have limited opportunities to be saved** and be made right with God.

This is a **strong rebuke, but it was spoken in love** to Peter, to Barnabas, and to other Jewish believers. Spurgeon wrote, *"It must have been very painful to Paul's feelings to come into conflict with Peter, whom he greatly esteemed; but yet, for the truth's sake, he knew no persons, and he had to withstand even a beloved brother when he saw that he was likely to pervert the simplicity of the gospel and rob the Gentiles of their Christian liberty. For this, we ought to be very grateful to our gracious God who raised up this brave champion, this beloved apostle of the Gentiles."*

Paul goes on with his argument in *verse 15* where he reviews the gospel.

II - Paul Reviews the Gospel

Galatians 2:16 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.

Here is the first mention of justification by faith in the entire book of Galatians. **What is justification?** Justification is the legal act by which **God declares the guilty sinner to be**

perfectly righteous based upon the righteousness of Jesus Christ. Paul will talk more about what justification is when we get to chapter three. But for now, I want us to understand that justification is more than forgiveness of sin. Justification is a gracious act of God where He **openly declares the guilty sinner, as one who has completely satisfied the demands of the law**. God looks at the sinner as if he had never sinned, as if the sinner has kept the whole law perfectly all his life. So, justification means being declared righteous.

The greatest and tragic lie in the world is that a **man may be justified by the works of the law**. No man, no woman, no boy, and no girl have ever been justified, declared right with God by the works of the law. Why? Because **perfection is required by the law** if one is to be accepted before God. And no one will ever keep the law of God perfectly or live perfectly in this life.

Romans 3:10 As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one.

Romans 3:23 For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.

And how is man justified? How is a man, a woman, a boy or a girl made right before God? First the negative, and then the positive!

Galatians 1:16 Knowing that a man is **not justified by the works of the law ... not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified**.

Paul states it negatively twice in this verse. Paul clearly asserts that justification does not come by the works of the law, which would include the ceremonial law of Moses and the Ten Commandments that came through Moses. No one is justified by the works of the law.

Then Paul states it positively, and he states it twice also in this passage. **Galatians 1:16 ... but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ,**

Here Paul emphasizes the part that faith plays in justification. A man is justified **through faith in Christ Jesus**. Faith means **much more than mere mental or intellectual assent**. It means to believe in your heart the truth about Jesus Christ, His Person and His work. Paul declares in **Romans 10:9**, “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.” Faith in Christ means believing in your heart who Christ is and what He has done as it is revealed in the Scripture. It is trusting Jesus Christ and Him alone for salvation.

Phil Newton asks “*Why does Paul go to such great lengths to repeat this truth over and over? I believe it is **because of our natural propensity for trusting in ourselves and our own merit** for our standing with God. There is a battle raging today throughout the world in the heads and hearts of multitudes of people, who just will not accept the fact that they can do absolutely nothing to justify themselves before God!*”

Now, going back to what Paul wrote in **verse 15**, **though we who are Jews** have all the religious privileges and have a great advantage over the Gentiles, **yet we know** that no one is justified by the works of the law. Notice what Paul says in the middle of **verse 16**, “**even we [Jews] have**

believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law.” Paul’s point is with **all our privileges as Jews**, we know that **we still had to be justified by grace alone**, though faith alone, and in Christ alone.

III - Paul Responds to Objection

Galatians 2:17 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.

Here Paul anticipates objections from the Judaizers. The Judaizers might object, *“Doesn’t this doctrine of justification by faith alone without the works of the law, make Christ the minister or promoter of sin? If a man is saved by grace alone, though faith alone, and in Christ alone, doesn’t that encourage sin and godless living?”*

Since God freely justifies, not those who try hard, but instead those who do not work; and since He justifies, not those who are good people, but instead the ungodly, **then why work at being good?** Why not just eat, drink, and be merry? They insist that this kind of teaching encourages sin and lawlessness.

John Stott summarizes the anticipated objection from the Judaizers like this, *“Your doctrine of justification through faith in Christ only, apart from the works of the law, is a highly dangerous doctrine. It fatally weakens a man’s sense of moral responsibility. If he can be accepted through trusting in Christ, without any necessity to do good works, you are actually encouraging him to break the law, which is the vile heresy of “antinomianism” [lawlessness or licentiousness].”*

Donald Campbell puts it this way, *“Paul’s opponents argued, however, that since justification by faith eliminated the Law, it encouraged sinful living. A person could believe in Christ for salvation and then do as he pleased, having no need to do good works.”*

And what is Paul’s response? God forbid! May it never be! Absolutely not! Paul answers this objection with a strong and forceful, **“No!” Justification by grace alone**, through faith alone, and in Christ alone **does not lead to licentious living, but instead it leads to godly living**. Then starting in [verse 18](#), Paul gives the reason one why it is absolutely pointless to think that Christ encourages sin and licentious living.

[Galatians 2:18](#) For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

Again, I like how John Stott explains this passage *“He [Paul] specially denies the added allegation that he was guilty of making Christ the agent or author of men’s sins. On the contrary, he goes on, ‘I make myself a transgressor’ (Gal 3:18+). In other words, ‘if after my justification I am still a sinner, it is my fault and not Christ’s. I have only myself to blame; no-one can blame Christ.’”*

Paul goes on to say in [Galatians 2:19](#), *“For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”*

Paul knew that the Law did not liberate him, but in fact enslaved him and condemned him. This is the point of 1 Corinthians 15:55-56 “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.”

Death is like a poisonous and deadly serpent. It bites and it kills, and its strength comes from the law. The strength of sin springs from the fact that it is the violation of God’s law. But Paul goes on to say in verse 57, “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Jesus Christ liberated us. He has set us free and therefore no longer under the sting, we are no longer the condemning power of the law. **Now we are free, no, not free to live for ourselves, but free to live for God.**

Galatians 2:19, “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”

Freedom from law gives the Christian liberty to live for Christ. The objection reveals a misunderstanding of what a justification is. God justifies the ungodly, not for them to stay ungodly but that they may become godly, **that they might be free and have power to live unto God.**

Titus 3:4 But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 5: Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6: Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; 7: That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8: This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, **that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works.** These things are good and profitable unto men.

Free and gracious justification of sinners **does not encourage lawlessness but instead it produces righteousness and obedience** in the believers. As someone pointed out, “*Actually, grace inspires us even more because it is based on love and freedom, not slavery to the “rules” and trying to earn God’s favor. The basis of our lives is actually Christ living His life through us. So, it is not us doing it but Christ living in us (Galatians 2:19-20). You will find a much more fruitful life living by grace.*” To which I say AMEN!

Closing Thoughts

Paul made it clear that there is **only one gospel**. The gospel for the **Jews** and the gospel for the **Gentiles** is one and the same. It is important to notice that there was **no response recorded from Peter**. Lenski adds, “*We see why Peter made no defense. It would have been preposterous [absurd] for him to make even the attempt. To deny or to contradict the finding of the conference would have included a denial of the central part of the gospel. Peter was erring. But his greatness is evident: he accepted public rebuke in all humility, he mended his ways. How many men, high in the church, have done the same when they were in the wrong?*”

So, what is the outcome of this difficult and tense confrontation between two Christian leaders? First, the purity of the gospel was defended and preserved. Second, Paul once again demonstrated that he was independent from other apostles. Paul’s authority as an apostle was confirmed through this correction of Peter.

Now, before we close in prayer, let me leave you with these thoughts, **God justified us by grace alone**, through faith alone, in Christ alone, why? **So that you and I might live unto God**. It is sad that there are too many people do not think their life has purpose! Too many people live their life without direction and reason. Brothers and sisters in Christ, if you have been justified by faith, you belong to Jesus Christ who died for you that you might live **not only through Him but also for Him**. **Now, live unto God, live unto Him, live for His glory.**

2 Corinthians 5:15 And that he died for all, that they which live **should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him** which died for them, and rose again.

AMEN!