

Galatians 2 pt. 3 v. 14-21 -- Paul's challenge to Peter and the Antiochians

V. 14 - The impetus for Paul's opposition to Peter, Judaizers, and the rest of the people who are playing the hypocrite is that they were obscuring and twisting the truth of the gospel.

Remember that Gospel means good news or good message. The good message is found consistently proclaimed in God's Word, both Old and New Testament.

I like how Paul writes it to Titus, one of his companions. He says:

[Tit 2:11-14 NKJV] 11 For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men, 12 teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly in the present age, 13 looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ, 14 who gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself [His] own special people, zealous for good works.

And what is the only requirement to share in this good message, this redemption? It is only faith, belief.

There is no other list of requirements added to the gospel.

The gospel is not:

Jesus + giving of your money; Jesus + a strict moral code; Jesus + ritual;
Jesus + church; Jesus + ANYTHING!

Now there is a strong correlation with faith, holiness, being made holy and living a life of holiness - wherein some of those things DO happen (i.e. being part of the Body - the church; living a life of practical holiness daily rather than theoretically, etc.)

BUT the requirement is only Christ - otherwise we are found frontloading the gospel - adding heavy burdens on to people who are broken anyway - that is not the gospel.

It is simply the cross of Christ reconciling mankind to God so that we might receive His righteousness, by no merit of our own, but simply because God loves us and cares for us. We are his cherished creation and He longs to enjoy eternity with us - as a Father and his children.

Paul opposes Peter publicly and addresses the assembled group of people who are there in the midst.

His first rhetorical question is, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you^[fn] compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”

Incidentally, it is in this way that we take pause to remember that the first century church - while often held up as the idol of perfection for the modern church was also afflicted by human sin. AND, we find encouragement in that, because Christ did not abandon her - and we will not abandon us.

This is the beginning of Paul's public correction on legalism, or a regression to legalism.

Understand that legalism is regressing, not progressing - we have all heard the lie, "this is not necessary but if you want to be a better Christian..."

The fact is - if you want to be a better Christian then hang the entirety of who you are on the merits and righteousness of Christ knowing that all of your own are vanity and then be clay in his hands as he shapes you to His glory!

Back to Paul's question - if Jews, like Peter and others, could momentarily set aside the law for convenience sake then they are implying by their actions that the law is not required for righteousness but merely formal ritual.

If that's the case, there is no requirement for the law to be righteous, then why would they compel non-Jewish Christians to observe their customs that may have been otherwise unknown to them?

Those non-Jewish believers, Gentiles, were brought into the kingdom without any prior legal requirement, they were truly dependent on the grace of Christ.

Paul is demonstrating here their inconsistency and bad doctrine. Here we are reminded that good doctrine is structurally sound and consistent because it is built upon the foundation of Jesus Christ.

In doing this Paul shines a spotlight on their hypocrisy, perhaps thinking, “I know you guys, you haven’t always been like this, but now when you want to put on a show to try to stratify the kingdom you change your behavior.”

The behavior that Peter, Barnabas, men from James, all of the other Jews fell into is a trap for even the most seasoned Christians - maybe especially so as we continue to walk out our faith and at some point along the way feel like we have to DO MORE, DO BETTER.

V. 15-16 The emptiness of the law and dependency for the Jewish people to be justified by faith - even though they observed the law.

“We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles...” This statement may ruffle our pride a bit. We may think, wrongly, wait...I’m not a sinner. Oh yes we are!

That's not entirely Paul's point though. He isn't being condescending.

About Paul's heart for this confrontation Matthew Henry writes: "Paul adhered resolutely to his principles, when others faltered in theirs; he was as good a Jew as any of them (for he was a Hebrew of the Hebrews), but he would magnify his office as the apostle of the Gentiles, and therefore would not see them discouraged and trampled upon."

He's not looking down from on high, scorning the gentiles requiring them to be something else to receive fellowship with Christ or with other believers.

Paul's point though is that the Jews had a unique relationship with God.

While the Gentiles for the most part dabbled in pagan worship, idolatry, heathenism, etc.; the Jews, God's covenant people, were taught about holiness since their adoption by God

[Deu 7:6-8 NKJV] 6 "For you [are] a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for Himself, a special treasure above all the peoples on the face of the earth. 7 "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; 8 "but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers...

-- and yet the morally righteous gentiles were found to have a law unto themselves.

Paul writes much about this dichotomy in Romans 2

[Rom 2:13-15 NKJV] 13 (for not the hearers of the law [are] just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; 14 for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, 15 who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves [their] thoughts accusing or else excusing [them])...

Now the Jewish people, God's special people, had a special relationship with the God of creation.

[Rom 3:1-2 NKJV] 1 What advantage then has the Jew, or what [is] the profit of circumcision? 2 Much in every way! Chiefly because to them were committed the oracles of God.

That's God's word - the scriptures. It is by them that Christ was foretold, that redemption came near to mankind, that the law became our schoolmaster showing us holiness, love, and grace.

Paul says though that even in that favored state - chosen from among the people of the earth, receiving the covenants, the prophets, the word of

God, bearing the messianic line of Christ -- even through all of that-- they know that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

The Jewish people need Jesus too. The law will never make them perfect, it will only expose their imperfections, their need for atonement - wherein a pious Hebrew might argue that the law makes provision for atonement by vicarious sacrifice of animals and the like...wherein we say:

[Heb 10:1-6 NKJV] 1 For the law, having a shadow of the good things to come, [and] not the very image of the things, can never with these same sacrifices, which they offer continually year by year, make those who approach perfect. 2 For then would they not have ceased to be offered? For the worshipers, once purified, would have had no more consciousness of sins. 3 But in those [sacrifices there is] a reminder of sins every year. 4 For [it is] not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sins. 5 Therefore, when He came into the world, He said: "Sacrifice and offering You did not desire, But a body You have prepared for Me. 6 In burnt offerings and [sacrifices] for sin You had no pleasure.

So then, the point Paul is making is that both the Hebrew and the Gentile are dependent on the grace of Christ to be justified by faith.

V.17-19 - Can seem like a tricky portion but if we keep it in context it is quite plain.

These Jewish men: the Apostles, and a preponderance of believers in the church in Jerusalem, were beggars for the grace of Christ and they were supposed to be looking intently at the person and work of Christ as their only means of salvation.

But in a parallel effort they were found participating in ceremony and ritual that some said would absolve them of their sins.

If that's the case then they are then found admitting a need for further remission of sins over and above what Christ accomplished on the cross.

This is the worst of heresies! It is denying the efficacy of the cross. It is in all practical ways denying that Christ made them holy.

Is Christ a minister of sin? Has he left us partially in our sins? Do we need Jesus + something else to make us holy?

No! He makes us holy!

For one to return to the the law was to admit that Christ's atonement had failed! That they were still in need of reconciliation! That is not sound doctrine. And yet it is that practical legalism that infests many Christian hearts even today.

Listen, if you believe in Christ then you are saved! Once and for all! No one and nothing can improve upon that.

These men, and many today, were rebuilding the law of requirement that was fulfilled, and removed by Christ. They were building an altar to worship at that focuses on something other than the cross.

V.19-20

Being slain by the law to live unto God. Paul uses this language in Romans as well and he will continue to build upon this idea that the purpose of the Law, the requirement of the Old Testament is to bring men to Christ - to slay us as it were in our sin, to show our need for resuscitation through a living being - Jesus Christ.

[Rom 7:7-12 NKJV] 7 What shall we say then? [Is] the law sin? Certainly not! On the contrary, I would not have known sin except through the law. For I would not have known covetousness unless the law had said, "You shall not covet." 8 But sin, taking opportunity by the commandment, produced in me all [manner of evil] desire. For apart from the law sin [was] dead. 9 I was alive once without the law, but when the commandment came, sin revived and I died. 10 And the commandment, which [was] to [bring] life, I found to [bring] death. 11 For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it killed [me]. 12 Therefore the law [is] holy, and the commandment holy and just and good.

The law kills us because we are crushed under its weight, but the law is good because it brings us to the end of ourself where we meet Christ at the cross.

We find ourselves, as Paul, Crucified with Christ. The old person we were is condemned to death under the law and dies with Christ on Calvary in the first century.

Our new person is raised to life by his eternal resurrection -- and by the Spirit, His Spirit, the Holy Spirit, we have life and it is Christ who possesses our mortal bodies.

We will reflect HIM - AS HE LIVES IN US! This is when we begin to live out lives of holiness because it is the HOLY spirit that lives in us - our old person is dead. So what manner of behavior do we live? Holiness and the character of Christ.

Is Christ living in me, or am I living unto myself, with the thin veneer of faith, the stink of hypocrisy - much like the legalists in Antioch? Playing the game but altogether dead to the grace of Christ.

V.21 Paul's dependence on grace - the whole point of the thing! If the Law is enough, if good works are enough, then the cross is pointless.

If we require extra work to improve upon the cross we are saying that the cross was not enough to save us.

This was the struggle for the Galatians, and it is the struggle for many anxious believers today who have either cast aside the grace of Christ, had it stolen from them, or never been introduced.

BUT, it is grace alone by which we are saved. That much is certain. Everything else that proposes to be a way, or the way, to reconcile man to God is fraudulent and false.

Do not set aside God's grace loved ones - cling to it for dear life, for it is life.