

Fourth Sunday after Pentecost- Galatians Series #2

June 12, 2016

Galatians 2:11-21

By Observing the Law No One will be Justified

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Dear Friends in Christ Jesus,

It was a period of transition. Jesus had risen and ascended into heaven after reconciling the entire world of sinners to his Father. Everything in the law that pointed to the Savior's coming and his sacrifice was no longer necessary. In some cases the law was not even beneficial because it got in the way of the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ. That is what happened between Peter and Paul.

There had been a council at the church in Jerusalem. The apostles agreed that Paul would serve the Gentiles. Peter would serve the Jews. Sometime after that, Peter travelled north to Antioch in Syria. In the new freedom we have in Christ, racial and cultural walls torn down, the law that served until Christ came now fulfilled, Peter rightfully joined in the fellowship meals with Gentile Christians.

Peter's subsequent actions, however, called into question the truth of justification by faith Paul was teaching. This truth is our theme. **By Observing the Law No One will be Justified.** To act otherwise is not in line with the truth of the gospel. We put our faith in Christ that we may be justified by faith in Christ.

Some Jewish Christians came to Antioch from James in Jerusalem. After they arrived, "Peter began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group." Paul rightfully identified Peter's action as hypocrisy that led others away from the truth. Peter knew it was all right to eat with Gentile Christians. These Jewish Christians still were practicing the ways of the old covenant. By his action of avoiding the Gentiles, Peter was guilty of a lie. In effect, Peter was saying that those Jews who still kept the law were doing something necessary in order to be a believer. This contradicted the gospel Paul was preaching.

In love, Paul did not go behind Peter's back. Paul "opposed him to his face." We would say Paul was upfront with Peter and spoke with him directly, "in front of them all." Paul reminded Peter that he was a Jew who now lived like a Gentile since there is no difference in Christ. But acting like he did, Peter was forcing the Gentiles "to follow Jewish customs."

Peter was rebuilding the law that Christ had destroyed by obeying it perfectly. No one has to keep the law to be righteous in God's sight. Jesus fulfilled the law for perfect righteousness already. To teach otherwise as Peter was doing made the gospel wrong and a sin. And if the gospel of justification by faith alone is sin, then that means those who believe it are not justified, and Christ promotes sin. About those horrible notions Paul wrote the strongest prohibition, "God forbid," or in weaker English, "Absolutely not."

By observing the law no one will be justified. Paul wrote about this incident to the Galatians because false teachers were telling the Galatian Christians just the opposite as Peter had done by his actions. Paul reminded the Galatians that the works of the law, obedience to the commandments, has nothing to do with God declaring us righteous. God already has done that on the basis on Christ's perfect obedience and sacrifice of that perfection on the cross.

We need to hear this pure gospel regularly. The sinful nature tries to convince us that love for God and love for my neighbor are necessary along with faith in Christ for salvation. False prophets appeal to that nature and promise that as I try harder to be holy, as I strive to make satisfaction for sin, as if that were even possible or necessary, as I look to my sanctified life with its evidence of faith then God will credit me for my righteousness toward salvation. I need the constant reminder Paul so beautifully expressed, "for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing."

God forbid! No, we put our faith in Christ that we may be justified by Christ. That is the only way of forgiveness and salvation.

Paul wrote the correct understanding of the law. “for through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.” I am free from the requirements of the law because Jesus kept it for me. Now I do not have to attempt in vain to be holy. Instead I trust solely in Christ’s holiness. I am free to live for Christ.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” I along with all my sin and guilt died on the cross in Christ. The cross of Jesus Christ leaves no room for doubt that I am a sinner and that my sins condemn me. Now I no longer must live by the power and demands of my sinful flesh. The Christian’s life on earth is a life of sanctification.

The source and element of sanctification is faith. Its characteristic is love. Only God’s grace in Christ by the Spirit has brought about both in our lives. “The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God...”

Peter was setting aside the grace of God in the weakness of fear. By acting as if obedience to the law was necessary he was setting aside the grace of God. When I trust in the pure gospel, I do not set God’s grace aside. I cling to the gospel. We put our faith in Christ so that we are justified by Christ. We do not seek God’s declaration that we are righteousness in his sight in any other person than Christ, or in any other place than his cross.

The gospel has abolished the law. Not in order that we might keep on sinning without concern. But in order that we may live to God just as the branch produces vines that produce good fruit. We are not about building up again something that God has destroyed. We do that if we wrongly make a place for our works in the cause of our salvation. We put our faith in Christ so that we may be justified by Christ.

Do not be foolish like the Galatians. Do not let anyone bewitch you. Do not try to attain your goal by human effort because as Paul quotes the prophet Habakkuk in Galatians 3:11, “The righteous will live by faith.” Amen. <SDG>