

Paul's challenge to Peter at Antioch continued...

• Peter Rebuked by Paul for his inconsistency

1. Two kinds of sinner

• Scandalous gentiles & 'respectable' Jews

2. No one can be justified by the Mosaic Law

• A wrong view – Paul is not against legalism. The law minus the Jewish ceremonial parts is still relevant

• The right

Galatians 2:15–21 continues the story of what Paul said to Peter on the famous occasion when he publicly challenged him. When Peter came to Antioch he relaxed with many gentile Christians. He abandoned living in a very Jewish way, and Jewish and gentile Christians enjoyed good fellowship together. But when intimidating 'false brothers' came, claiming to represent James the half-brother of Jesus himself, Peter became afraid and backed away from his enjoyment of fellowship with gentile Christians. Paul publicly rebuked him for his inconsistency. But then he went on to re-state the gospel-message. *'We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the gentiles'* ¹, but we know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. Even we have believed in Jesus Christ, in order to be justified by the faithfulness of Christ, and not by the works of the law. For no one at all will be justified by the works of the law' ².

1 2:15

2 2:16

1. **There are two kinds of 'sinner'** Paul says 'We are not . . . sinners from among the gentiles.' He is not saying that the Jewish Christians have never sinned at all! But they are not **gentile** sinners. In the ancient world the gentiles were living in filth and degradation of the worst kind. There was endless idolatry, immorality, deceit, theft, murder, and wickedness of every kind. It was all open and obvious. The Jews were very proud that their culture was different. 'We Jews are not like that!', they said with great pride. 'We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the gentiles!' But of course the Jews were sinners in a different way. Their way of sin was more hidden. They could be callous, judgemental, racist. They despised gentiles. But they felt there were 'respectable'. The truth is there are two kinds of sinner: the scandalous sinner and the respectable sinner.

2. **No one can be justified by the Mosaic law.** 'We are respectable Jewish Christians' – says Paul – 'but even we Jewish Christians know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.' This is a very important statement and we must consider it in more detail.

The first question is this: what is the theme of Galatians? What is Paul's overall message in this letter of his? What does he mean by 'works of the law' and what does he mean by 'justification'? These are very important matters and we must attend to them. There is an interpretation of Galatians that goes like this:

Paul is only bothered about Jewish ceremonies. He is not saying that we are not justified by the law at all. We are indeed justified by the law but we are not justified by the **ceremonial, Jewish**, parts of the law. Paul is not arguing **generally** in favour of faith and against 'works righteousness', and he is not arguing against the **general** concept of legalism. All he is doing is arguing against the continuing relevance of the ceremonial laws and foods laws. We are indeed justified by the Mosaic law, but not by the Jewish parts of it.

This is not my teaching. I mention it only to say that it is wrong! It is not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. The fact is:

Galatians is indeed arguing **generally** in favour of faith and against 'works

view – Paul IS against legalism altogether

• **An old question and central to the gospel**

• **Paul is indeed concerned about the social side of the gospel...**

• **But he doesn't make distinctions within the law...**

• **And his positive statement does not mention the law at all.**

righteousness', and he is indeed arguing against the **general** concept of legalism. We must consider the reasons why this 'ceremonial law only' approach is mistaken. It is of course an old question. It is the same kind of question of interpretation that arose between Jesus and the Pharisees, between Paul and his enemies, between Augustine of Hippo in the fifth century (who saw quite clearly that the gospel is a gospel of grace) and his contemporary Jerome (who thought salvation was by works), between Luther and the Bible-believing Christians of the sixteenth century and people like Desiderius Erasmus and Johann Eck who both opposed the sixteenth century Reformation of the church. It is the difference between the Bible-believing 'evangelicals' of the 19th and 20th centuries and the so-called 'liberals' who explained the gospel away. In short: it is the difference between what is and what is not the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ.

We must begin by agreeing that Paul is very concerned about the social side of the gospel. When the Judaizers insisted that salvation is by Jesus-plus-Mosaic-law-keeping the social side was inevitably very prominent. The legalism of the Judaizers became an issue because of questions like 'Must I be circumcised? Who can I have a meal with? Am I allowed to eat pork? Must I keep Jewish holy days?'

But we must notice how Paul does not reply to the Judaizers. He does not say, 'You **are** justified by the important parts of the law, but you are **not** justified by the Jewish parts.' He does not start making distinctions **within** the law and say, 'You are justified by that part, but not by this part.' He does **not** say, 'You are justified by the ten commandments, but you are not justified by the less important regulations.' It is true that the issue in Galatia focused mainly on circumcision, but when Paul contradicts the false teaching he does so by widening the issue and dealing more generally with the way of salvation.

His positive statement does not mention the law. He says, 'A person is justified by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.' ^{□1} That is all! He does not say, 'By the faithfulness of Christ, plus the ten commandments.' He says we have believed in Jesus Christ, in order to be justified by the faithfulness of Christ, and **not** by the works of the law.' ^{□2} He does not say, '... and only by a **few** of the works of the law.' Then he says, 'No one at all ^{□3} – Jewish law-keepers or anyone else – will be justified by the works of the law.' Surely it is clear that no one is justified by any part of the Mosaic law at all! Not even by the ten commandments.

□1 2:16a

□2 2:16b

□3 2:16c



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