

## Justified by Faith, Not Laws

Lesson for October 15, 2023

### Unit II: Faith Triumphs, Law Falls Short

**Adult Topic:** One's Faith is the Key

**Background Scripture:** Galatians 2:11-21

**Printed Text:** Galatians 2:11-21

**Key verse:** *"The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."* (Galatians 2:20b, NIV)

"The question is asked: How can justification take place without the works of the law, even though James says: 'Faith without works is dead'? In answer, the apostle distinguishes between the law and faith, the letter and grace. The 'works of the law' are works done without faith and grace, by the law, which forces them to be done through fear or the enticing promise of temporal advantages. But 'works of faith' are those done in the spirit of liberty, purely out of love to God. And they can be done only by those who are justified by faith.

"An ape can cleverly imitate the actions of humans. But he is not therefore, a human. If he became a human, it would undoubtedly be not by virtue of the works by which he imitated man but by virtue of something else; namely, by an act of God. Then, having been made a human, he would perform the works of humans in proper fashion.

"Paul does not say that faith is without its characteristic works, but that it justifies without the works of the law. Therefore, justification does not require the works of the law; but it does require a living faith, which performs its works."

*Martin Luther*

### Key Terms

1. **Gentiles** (verse 12) – A person of a non-Jewish nation or of non-Jewish faith.
2. **Hypocrisy** (verse 13) – The false assumption of an appearance of virtue or religion.
3. **Justified** (verse 17) – The act by which God moves a willing person from the state of sin (injustice) to the state of grace (justice). Having or shown to have a just, right, or reasonable basis.

## Lesson Background

Galatians derives its title (pros Galatas), from the region in Asia Minor (modern Turkey), where the churches addressed were located. It is the only one of Paul's epistles specifically addressed to churches in more than one city.

Galatians was written:

- To warn us to safeguard the integrity of the gospel message and the doctrine of justification by faith which lies at the heart of God's salvation plan.
- To help us see the proper role of the law of God.
- To encourage us to stand fast in the liberty and freedom that belongs to us by virtue of our union with Jesus Christ.
- To expose the dangers of any form of legalism that would draw our dependence away from Christ alone.
- To help us to understand the process of sanctification in the life of a genuine believer.

It comes to grips with the question of what real Christian life is like. The answer can be characterized by one word, "liberty." The Christian is called to liberty in Jesus Christ. The cry of this epistle is that Christians might discover the liberty of the sons of God in accordance with all that God has planned for man in the way of freedom and enjoyment. Its aim is freedom of our human spirits to the utmost extent, restrained only as necessary for us to exist in harmony with the design of God. Therefore, this letter has been called the "Bill of Rights of the Christian Life," or the "Magna Carta of Christian Liberty," the "Emancipation Proclamation" from all forms of legalism and bondage in the Christian experience." (Stedman) It was written to counter the arguments put forth by false teachers (Judaizers) and to emphasize that they are not a part of the legal system of the earthly Jerusalem, but are of the above Jerusalem, children free from the Law.

"Paul addresses a different charge in Galatians 2. In Chapter 1, he shows his independence from the other apostles concerning his reception and understanding of the Christian gospel. This separation refutes the legalists' objection that his message is a distorted, human version of the true gospel. In Chapter 2, however, Paul spends his energy spelling out his close relationship with the church leaders in Jerusalem. He does this to answer the argument that the gospel he taught was not approved by these high officials. Paul explains that not only he but also his message was accepted and affirmed by the apostles, launching him into a ministry greater than he had before." (Swindoll)

"In verses 7-9 the following lessons stand out: (1) Under God Paul's gospel is independent; that is, it is able to maintain itself in relation to friends and foes. It vanquishes the arguments of its foes, and is enthusiastically endorsed by its friends, who recognize it as the gospel which they themselves cherish. (2) One gospel suffices for every age and every clime. Methods of presentation may have to vary, but essentially the gospel for the first century A.D. is the gospel for today. Those who maintain that it is 'not relevant' for this day and age are committing a tragic error. Only then when the message of the love of God in Christ has penetrated heart and mind, resulting in a life of unselfish dedication to God and grateful observance of the principles of conduct he has laid down in his Word, will solutions be found for the problems that now vex the individual, the family, society, the church, the nation, and the world." (Hendriksen)

Notes collected and developed by Ethel Williams

## I. Hypocritical Faith's Failure (Galatians 2:11-13)

**Now when Peter had come to Antioch:** Peter approved of Paul's gospel and ministry when Paul came to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9), and God used Peter himself to welcome Gentiles into Christianity without the precondition of becoming Jews (Acts 11:1-18).

**He withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision:** Though Peter was previously in agreement with welcoming Gentiles into the church without bringing them under the Law of Moses, when Peter came to **Antioch** (Paul's home church), it was another story. He refused to associate with Gentile Christians once certain Jewish believers from Jerusalem came.

These men were Christians of Jewish background. Paul called them **certain men... from James and those who were of the circumcision**. Knowing their background, Peter knew they would be offended at his fellowship with Gentiles who had not come under the Law of Moses. In their eyes, these uncircumcised Gentiles were not really Christians at all. Therefore, to please them and to avoid a conflict, Peter treated these Gentile Christians as if they were not Christians at all.

Peter *had* known that God did not require Gentiles to come under the Law of Moses for salvation. He learned this from the vision God gave him in Acts 10:10-16. He learned this from the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Gentiles who believed (apart from being circumcised) in Acts 10:44-48. He learned this by the agreement of the other leaders of the church in Acts 11:1-18. Now, Peter turned back on all that he *had* known about the place of Gentiles in the church, and he treated uncircumcised Gentiles as if they were not saved at all.

"He seems to have taken this action shamefacedly. As Bishop Lightfoot says, 'the words describe forcibly the cautious withdrawal of a timid person who shrinks from observation.'" (Stott)

"It is perhaps curious that nobody seems to have recalled that Jesus ate 'with publicans and sinners', which can scarcely mean that he conformed to strict Jewish practice." (Morris)

Sadly, others would follow Peter's lead. "The sins of teachers are the teachers of sins." (Trapp)

**I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed:** This shows how serious the matter was to Paul. He had a public confrontation with Peter over the issue (*I said to Peter before them all*, Galatians 2:14).

This was also serious because it involved the issue of *eating together*. Before the **certain men came from James**, Peter **would eat with the Gentiles**. Yet once they came, Peter **withdrew and separated himself**. This separation was probably at the church potluck dinner, which they called "the agape banquet" or the "love feast." They would also remember the Lord's death at this dinner and take communion together. Therefore, it is possible that Peter turned these Gentile Christians away from the communion table.

“It may be that the observance of holy communion was involved in this, for it seems that often in the early church it was celebrated at a meal shared by all the believers. If this was the case at Antioch, there would have been a division of believers at the table of the Lord.” (Morris)

“Paul not hearing this from the report of others, but being an eye-witness to it, doth not defer the reproof, lest the scandal should grow: nor doth he reprove him privately, because the offence was public, and such a plaster [bandage] would not have fitted the sore.” (Poole)

**Fearing those who were of the circumcision:** This explains *why* Peter did this, even when he knew that God welcomed Gentiles into the church without placing them under the Law of Moses. Out of fear, Peter acted against what he knew was right. “Peter perhaps felt that if the members of the embassy went back and told the Jerusalem church that he was eating with Gentiles it would compromise his position with the leading church.” (Morris)

It is easy to criticize Peter; but every person knows what it means to do something that you know is wrong. Everyone knows what it feels like to go against what you know very well is right. Everyone knows what it feels like when *social pressure* pushes you towards compromise in some way.

“Their withdrawal from table-fellowship with Gentile believers was not prompted by any theological principle, but by craven fear of a small pressure group... He still believed the gospel, but he failed to practice it.” (Stott)

This was the kind of behavior that dominated Peter’s life before he was transformed by the power of God. This was like Peter telling Jesus not to go to the cross, or Peter taking his eyes off of Jesus and sinking when walking on the water, or like Peter cutting off the ear of the servant of the High Priest when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. We see that the flesh was still present in Peter. Salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit did not make Peter perfect; the old Peter was still there, just seen less often.

We might be surprised that Peter compromised even though he knew better; but we are only surprised if we don’t believe what God says about the weakness and corruption of our flesh. Paul himself knew this struggle, as he described it in Romans 7:18: *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find.*

“No man’s standing is so secure that he may not fall. If Peter fell, I may fall. If he rose again, I may rise again. We have the same gifts that they had, the same Christ, the same baptism and the same Gospel, the same forgiveness of sins.” (Luther)

**Fearing those who were of the circumcision:** We don’t know what it was about these **certain men from James** that made Peter afraid. Perhaps they were men of strong personality. Perhaps they were men of great prestige and influence. Perhaps they made threats of one kind or another. Whatever it was, the desire to cater to these legalistic Jewish Christians was so strong that **even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy**. When these **men from James** came, *even Barnabas* treated the Gentile Christians as if they were not Christians at all.

*This* was amazing. Barnabas was Paul's trusted friend and associate. Barnabas stood beside Paul when he first met the apostles (Acts 9:27). Barnabas sought out Paul and brought him to Antioch to help with the ministry there (Acts 11:25). Acts 11:24 says of Barnabas, *he was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith*. Yet, Barnabas also failed at this critical test.

"The defection of Barnabas was of a far more serious nature with regard to Gentile freedom than the vacillation of Peter... Barnabas, the foremost champion of Gentile liberty next to Paul, had become a turncoat." (Wuest)

"It is not impossible that this incident, by producing a temporary feeling of distrust, may have prepared the way for the dissension between Paul and Barnabas which shortly afterwards led to their separation: Acts 15:39." (Lightfoot)

**The rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him:** This shows that the matter was bigger than just Peter and Barnabas. Peter first made the compromise of acting as if the Gentile Christians were not Christians at all. Then Barnabas followed him. Then **the rest of the Jews** at the church in Antioch followed Peter and Barnabas.

This shows what a heavy responsibility it is to be a leader. When we go astray, others will often follow. Satan knew that if he could make Peter take the wrong path, then many others would follow him.

**Played the hypocrite... carried away with their hypocrisy:** The word **hypocrite**, in the original language of the New Testament, means "one who puts on a mask," referring to an *actor*. In this case Peter, Barnabas, and the rest of the Jewish Christians in Antioch *knew* that these Gentile believers were really Christians. Yet, because of the pressure from the **certain men from James**, they *acted* like they were not Christians at all.

But there was more to it than this. Peter **withdrew and separated himself** from Gentile believers, when before **he would eat with the Gentiles**. In fact, he used to eat with them *often*.

Stott writes about the phrase **he would eat with Gentiles**: "The imperfect tense of the verb shows that this had been his regular practice. 'He... was in the habit of eating his meals with the gentiles'."

Yet now Peter refused to eat with Gentile *believers*. When a Jew refused to eat with a Gentile, he did this in obedience to Jewish rituals. Peter had already learned that obedience to these rituals (such as keeping kosher) was not essential for salvation, for either Jews or Gentiles (Acts 10 and Acts 11). Peter had stopped keeping these Jewish rituals for himself, but now *he acted as if he did keep them*, so as to accommodate the legalism of the **certain men from James**. Peter no longer kept a strict observance of the Law of Moses for himself, but by his actions, he implied that Gentile believers must keep the law – when he himself did not.

## II. Bold Faith Triumphs (Galatians 2:14-19)

**But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel:** At the foundation, this wasn't an issue of seating arrangements at the church potluck. It wasn't about table manners and being a good host. It wasn't even about being sensitive to another brother's conscience. Paul saw the issue for what it was; it was **about the truth of the gospel**.

When the *certain men from James*, and Peter, and Barnabas, and *the rest of the Jews* of the church in Antioch would not eat with Gentile Christians, they declared those Gentiles *unsaved unbelievers*. They said loud and clear, "You can only be right with God if you put yourself under the demands of the Law of Moses. You must be circumcised. You must eat a kosher diet. You must observe the feasts and rituals. You must do nothing that would imply partnership with someone who is not under the Law of Moses. This is the only way to receive the salvation of Jesus." *That* message made Paul say, **I saw that they were not straightforward about 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." (Luther)

**I said to Peter before them all:** What a scene this must have been! There they were, at the Antioch Christian potluck. The Gentile Christians had just been asked to leave, or were told to sit in their own section away from the real Christians. They also weren't allowed to share the same food that the real Christians ate. Peter – the honored guest – went along with all this. Barnabas – the man who led many of the Gentiles to Jesus – went along with all this. The *rest of the Jews* in the church at Antioch went along with all this. But Paul would not stand for it. Because this was a *public affront* to the Gentile Christians and because it was a *public denial of the truth of the gospel*, Paul confronted Peter in a *public* way.

It must have been hard, *knowing who Peter was*. Peter was the most prominent of all the disciples of Jesus. Peter was the spokesman for the apostles, and probably the most prominent Christian in the whole world at the time.

It must have been hard, *knowing who Paul was*. This was before any of Paul's missionary journeys; before he was an apostle of great prominence. At that point, Paul was far more famous for *who he was before he was a Christian* – a terrible persecutor of the church – than he was for who he was *as a Christian*.

It must have been hard, *knowing who was in agreement with Peter*. First, Paul had the strong, domineering personalities of the *certain men from James*. Then, Paul had *Barnabas*, who was probably his best friend. Finally, Paul had *the rest of the Jews*. Paul was in the minority on this issue – it was him and all the Gentile Christians against all the Jewish Christians.

As hard as this was, Paul did it because *he knew what was at stake*. This wasn't a matter of personal conduct or just personal sin on Peter's part. If that were the case it is unlikely that Paul would have first used such a public approach. This was a matter **about the truth of the gospel**; proclaiming, "This is how a man is right before God."

**If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews:** Paul first reminded Peter that *he himself did not live under strict obedience to the Law of Moses*. “Peter, you eat bacon and ham and lobster. You don’t keep a kosher diet. Yet now, before these visitors, these *certain men... from James*, now you act as if you keep these laws all the time.”

It isn’t hard to imagine the scene. They all had a good time until Paul spoiled the party. He probably wasn’t shouting, but he did speak with firmness in his voice. And as he told everyone that Peter didn’t live under the Law of Moses, the *certain men... from James* looked amazed. Their faces showed surprise. “What? Peter – the most prominent of all the apostles – *Peter* doesn’t live under the Law of Moses? *Peter* eats bacon and lobster? *Peter* eats with Gentiles?” As for Peter, his face became red, his heart beat faster, and he just felt sick to his stomach. Everyone else just felt awkward and wished the whole problem would go away.

We also wonder if Paul was nervous or bold; perhaps he was shaking from the adrenaline of the highly charged confrontation. We know that Paul did not necessarily have a commanding physical presence. Others said of Paul – and it was probably at least partially true – *his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible* (2 Corinthians 10:10). However Paul acted, *his words were memorable*, because he recalled them exactly here.

**Why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?** Perhaps Peter and the others might say, “We’re not *making* them live as Jews.” But of course they were; because their message was, “Unless you **live as Jews**, you aren’t saved.” This did in fact **compel Gentiles to live as Jews**.

**We who are Jews by nature... knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ:** “Peter, we all grew up as observant Jews. Yet we know very well that we were not considered right before God – **justified** – by **the works of the law** that we did. We know that we, even though we grew up as observant Jews, are considered right before God **by faith in Jesus Christ**.”

**Not justified by the works of the law:** This is Paul’s first use of the great ancient Greek word *dikaioo* (justified, declared righteous) in his letter to the Galatians. “It is a legal concept; the person who is ‘justified’ is the one who gets the verdict in a court of law. Used in a religious sense it means the getting of a favorable verdict before God on judgment day.” (Morris)

**Even we have believed in Christ Jesus:** Paul knew that even a strictly observant Jew such as he was could never be considered right before God by what he did under the Law of Moses. Instead, he, Peter, and every single Christian must **have believed in Christ Jesus**.

“‘Faith in Jesus Christ’, then, is not intellectual conviction only, but personal commitment. The expression in the middle of verse 16 is (literally) ‘we have believed *into (eis)* Christ Jesus.’ It is an act of committal, not just assenting to the fact that Jesus lived and died, but running to Him for refuge and calling on Him for mercy.” (Stott)

“It would be hard to find a more forceful statement of the doctrine of justification than this. It is insisted upon by the two leading apostles (‘we know’), confirmed from their own experience (‘we have believed’), and endorsed by the sacred Scriptures of the Old Testament (‘by works of the law shall no one be justified’). With this threefold guarantee we should accept the biblical doctrine of justification and not let our natural self-righteousness keep us from faith in Christ.” (Stott)

**That we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law:** This was a clear emphasis. “Peter, *we were not justified by being under the Law of Moses, but by faith in Jesus.*” By refusing fellowship with Gentile Christians, Peter said in his actions that we are – *in part* – considered right before God **by the works of the law**. Paul couldn’t stand for this, because it wasn’t the truth.

**For by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified:** Here, Paul emphasized the point in the strongest way possible. **No flesh** – not Gentile, not Jewish, not anyone – will be considered right before God **by the works of the law**.

It is plain to see how foolish and wrong it was for Peter to separate from these Gentile Christians because they had not put themselves under the Law of Moses. Because **by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified**, then what difference does it make if a Gentile is circumcised according to the Law of Moses? What difference does it make if a Gentile keeps a kosher table? All that matters is their **faith in Christ**, because that is how we are made right before God.

**But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin?** Now Paul dealt with an objection that the *certain men from James* would raise. It’s important to remember that Paul made this statement publicly, with the concerned parties right in front of him. On one side of the room were the *certain men from James*, who believed that God would not accept the Gentiles unless they put themselves under the Law of Moses. Peter sat with these men and so did Barnabas, who was Paul’s best friend. In fact, *all* the Christians of Jewish background sat with these Christians from Jerusalem who didn’t believe that the Gentiles in the church at Antioch were really saved at all. In a real-life setting like this, Paul couldn’t just speak his mind without answering the objections – spoken or unspoken – of those who disagreed with him.

As the men from Jerusalem saw it, the idea that we are made right before God by faith in Jesus *alone* wasn’t “real” enough. After all, Christians still struggled with sin. How could they have the “accepted by God” issue settled if they still battled sin? In their thinking, this made **Christ... a minister of sin**, because Jesus’ work of making them right with God apparently didn’t make them right enough.

“If God justifies bad people, what is the point of being good? Can’t we do as we like and live as we please?” (Stott)

**Certainly not!** Paul’s answer was brilliant. First, *yes*, **we seek to be justified by Christ** and not by Jesus *plus* our own works. Second, *yes*, **we ourselves also are found sinners**, that is, we acknowledge that we still sin even though we stand **justified by Christ**. But *no*, this **certainly** does **not** make Jesus the author or approver of sin in our life. He is not **a minister of sin**.

“To give a short definition of a Christian: A Christian is not somebody who has no sin, but somebody against whom God no longer chalks sin, because of his faith in Christ. This doctrine brings comfort to consciences in serious trouble.” (Luther)



**For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor:** Paul's answer was subtle but brilliant. If he were to **build again** a way to God through keeping the Law of Moses, then he would **make himself a transgressor**. Essentially Paul said, "There is *more sin* in trying to find acceptance before God by our law-keeping than there is sin in everyday life as a Christian."

These *certain men from James* thought they had to hang on to the Law – for themselves and for Gentiles – so there wouldn't be so much sin. What Paul shows is that by putting themselves under the law again they were sinning worse than ever.

How is it a sin to **build again** a way to God through the Law of Moses? In many ways, but perhaps the greatest is that it looks at Jesus, hanging on the cross, taking the punishment we deserved, bearing the wrath of God for us, and says to Him, "That's all very nice, but it isn't enough. Your work on the cross won't be good enough before God until I'm circumcised and eat kosher." This is a great insult to the Son of God.

Of course, this is the great tragedy of legalism. In trying to be *more* right with God, legalists end up being *less* right with God. This was exactly the situation of the Pharisees that opposed Jesus so much during His years of earthly ministry. Paul knew this thinking well, having been a Pharisee himself (Acts 23:6).

**For I through the law died to the law:** Paul made a bold statement, saying that he had **died to the law**. If he was dead to the law, then it was impossible for the law to be the way that he stood accepted by God.

Notice that it wasn't the **law** that was dead. The law reflects, in its context, the holy heart and character of God. There was nothing wrong with the law. It wasn't the **law** that **died**, but Paul **died to the law**.

How did Paul die to the law? **I through the law died to the law**. The law itself "killed" Paul. It showed him that he never could live up to the law and fulfill its holy standard. For a long time before Paul knew Jesus, he thought God would accept him because of his law-keeping. But he came to the point where he really understood the law – understanding it in the way Jesus explained it in the Sermon on the Mount ([Matthew 5-7](#)) – and then Paul realized that the law made him *guilty* before God, not *justified* before God. This sense of guilt before God "killed" Paul, and made him see that keeping the law wasn't the answer.

"*To die to the law* is to renounce it and to be freed from its dominion, so that we have no confidence in it and it does not hold us captive under the yoke of slavery." (Calvin)  
iv. The problem with the *certain men with James* was that they were not thinking and living as if they were dead to the law. For them, they were still alive under the law and they believed keeping the law would make them accepted by God. Not only were they living under the law, but they also wanted the Gentiles to live under the law.

**I through the law died to the law that I might live to God:** When Paul **died to the law**, then he could **live to God**. As long as he still tried to justify himself before God by all his law-keeping, he was dead. But when he **died to the law** then he could **live to God**.

### III. **Bold Faith's Source** (Galatians 2:20-21)

**I have been crucified with Christ:** Again, Paul anticipated a question from those who disagree with him. "Paul, when did you die to the law? You look alive to me!" Paul was happy to answer, "**I have been crucified with Christ**. I died to the law when Jesus died on the cross. He died in my place on the cross, so it is like it was me up on the cross. He died, and I died to the law when He died."

**It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me:** Since we died with Christ on the cross we have a different life. Our old life lived under the law is dead. Now we are alive to Jesus Christ and *Jesus is alive in us (but Christ lives in me)*.

Paul realized that on the cross, a great exchange occurred. He gave Jesus his old, try-to-be-right-before-God-by-the-law life, and it was crucified on the cross. Then Jesus gave Paul His life – Christ came to live in him. So Paul's life wasn't his own anymore, it belonged to Jesus Christ! Paul didn't own his own life (that life died); he simply managed the new life Jesus gave him.

**And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith:** Paul can only manage the new life Jesus gave him **by faith**. You can't live the new life Jesus gives on the foundation of law-keeping. You can only live it **by faith**.

When Paul said **I now live in the flesh**, he didn't mean that he lived a chronically sinful life. "By the term 'flesh' Paul does not understand manifest vices. Such sins he usually calls by their proper names, as adultery, fornication, etc. By 'flesh' Paul understands what Jesus meant in the third chapter of John, 'That which is born of the flesh is flesh'. (John 3:6) 'Flesh' here means the whole nature of man, inclusive of reason and instincts. 'This flesh,' says Paul, 'is not justified by the works of the law.'" (Luther)

The focus of this verse isn't the **flesh**, it is **faith**. "Faith is not simply a topic about which Paul preached from time to time. Nor is it a virtue which he practiced occasionally. It is central in all that he does." (Morris)

"Faith connects you so intimately with Christ, that He and you become as it were one person. As such you may boldly say: 'I am now one with Christ. Therefore Christ's righteousness, victory, and life are mine.' On the other hand, Christ may say: 'I am that big sinner. His sins and death are mine, because he is joined to me, and I to him.'" (Luther)

**In the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me:** The **faith** Paul lived by was not faith in himself, faith in the law, or faith in what he could earn or deserve before God. It was **faith in the Son of God**, Jesus Christ – **who loved me and gave Himself for me**.

Before, Paul's relationship with God was founded on what he could do for God – his faith was in himself. Now the foundation was what Jesus Christ had done for him – his faith was in Jesus. And Paul found a marvelous person to put his faith in! It was a person who **loved** him. It was a person who demonstrated that love when He **gave Himself for** Paul.

**Who loved me:** Paul can confidently give himself to Jesus because of the love Jesus has demonstrated in the *past*. “It is true that he loves us now, but Paul also wrote truly, ‘Who *loved* me.’ The verb is in the past tense. Jesus loved me upon the cross; loved me in the manger of Bethlehem; loved me before ever the earth was. There never was a time when Jesus did not love his people.” (Spurgeon)

**Gave Himself for me:** “*For me* is very emphatic. It is not enough to regard Christ as having died for the salvation of the world; each man must claim the effect and possession of this grace for himself personally.” (Calvin)

**I do not set aside the grace of God:** Paul concluded his public confrontation with Peter with strength. For these Jewish Christians from Jerusalem to require for themselves or anyone else to live under the Law of Moses to be right with God was to **set aside the grace of God** – the very thing Paul does **not** do.

To nullify grace would be to put one's trust, not in salvation as God's free gift, but in one's own efforts. To do this is to reject grace altogether, and relying on one's puny effort means that one nullifies that grace.” (Morris)

**If righteous comes through the law:** If this proposition is true, then Jesus **died in vain** – because you can be righteous before God by law-keeping, and you don't need the work of Jesus to make you righteous.

In Jesus' prayer in the garden (Matthew 26:39-42), He asked that if there could be any other way to accomplish what stood before Him at the cross, He asked to be spared the cross. But Jesus was not spared the cross, because there is no other way to accomplish what He did.

This is also the great problem with seeing the **grace of God** as something that *helps* us get to heaven, as if we put forth the best we can, and then grace supplies the rest. Grace doesn't *help*, it does it *all*. *All* of our righteousness comes from the work of Jesus for us.

“If my salvation was so difficult to accomplish that it necessitated the death of Christ, then all my works, all the righteousness of the Law, are good for nothing. How can I buy for a penny what cost a million dollars?” (Luther)

**I do not set aside the grace of God:** We don't know the immediate effect of this bold stand for the truth. Yet we know that over time Peter came to his senses and took Paul's words to heart. We know this from Acts 15:6-11, where Peter, *in Jerusalem*, before *James and Paul and Barnabas* and the other apostles, proclaimed that Gentiles *did not* have to come under the Law of Moses to be saved.

We know that Peter was already in agreement by how Paul stated the case in Galatians 2:15-17: *We... even we have believed... we might be justified by faith... we seek to be justified by Christ.* Paul is calling Peter's attention to something that Peter *believed* but did not *act* according to. One may *believe* that Jesus saves and we don't save ourselves; but one must also refuse to *act* and *think* that we save ourselves.

We can trust that God used this awkward encounter in Antioch for *everyone's* good.

- It was good for Paul, because he stayed true and proclaimed the gospel.
- It was good for Peter, because he was corrected, and as a result became even more convinced in the truth than before.
- It was good for Barnabas, because he came to the correct belief on this matter.
- It was good for the men who came from James and started the whole mess, because a line was drawn at the true gospel, and they had to decide.
- It was good for the Jewish believers in Antioch, because they had the truth spelled out clearly before them.
- It was good for the Gentile believers in Antioch, because their faith and liberty in Jesus was strengthened.
- It was good for us because the truth still lives today.

All this good came, but only because Paul was willing to do something that was *totally right*, but extremely *uncomfortable*. Peter was willing to do that too, when he admitted he was wrong. Peter and Paul were willing to sacrifice their comfort zone for what was right.

## Lesson Summary

Galatians 2:11-21 contains Paul's statements about the difference between faith in Christ and following the law. This passage teaches that:

- Salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, apart from any aspects of the Mosaic Law.
- As believers, you are free from Law-keeping.
- If the Law is done away with in Christ, you have no way to govern the way you should live as a Christian.
- Nobody can be justified in God's eyes by the works of the law, but only by faith in Christ.
- To believe in Christ is to be crucified with Him and to have Him replace your sinful self in you.
- We are made right with God through Jesus' sacrifice.
- If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

Paul sums up in verse 21: "If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"