

Paul Rebukes Peter for His Treatment of the Gentile Believers

Galatians 2:11-21

Galatians 2:11-21: *“Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; ¹² for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. ¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as 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 faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. ¹⁷ “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! ¹⁸ For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”*

Background Notes

Why did Paul record his rebuke to Peter? Did he want to show that the apostle Peter was not infallible? No. Including the rebuke was a part of Paul’s argument to show that what the Judaizers were teaching was wrong – and that Paul’s apostolic authority and the gospel he preached was acknowledged by all to be from the Lord. Even Peter, who was rebuked, acknowledged Paul’s authority.

The basic error of the false teachers called Judaizers was that they did not understand God’s grace, so they insisted that salvation was **not a free gift** from God. They believed that you had to add work to your salvation by keeping the requirements of the Law of Moses. This is something that no one (other than Jesus Christ) has ever been able to do.

There were two kinds of Judaizers: Christian and non-Christian. The non-Christian Judaizers were legalistic Pharisees who did not acknowledge Christ in any way. They said that salvation could only be obtained by keeping the requirements of the Mosaic Law. That was the apostle Paul’s position before he became a Christian.

The Christian Judaizers acknowledged Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and they believed in His work on the cross as payment for the penalty of sin. But they also felt that believers had to keep the requirements of the Law as your part in the

“package of salvation.” Thus Gentiles who did not have the Law of Moses were considered “second-class,” and they must submit to the legal requirements of Judaism in order to become Christians.

I think both types of Judaizers were in view in Galatians 2. The “*false brethren*” of verse 4 were unbelieving Pharisaic Judaizers who had infiltrated the early Church. They weren’t so radical that they killed Christians, as Paul had done before his conversion, but they did everything they could to eradicate this new sect of Christian Jews.

On the other hand, the “*certain men from James*” (v12) were Christian Judaizers. James (our Lord’s half-brother and the author of the epistle of James) was a pillar of the Jerusalem church, but he wasn’t yet completely freed-up from the influence of Judaism.

This was also true of Peter. Because of “peer pressure” from Christian Judaizers, Peter gradually withdrew from the Gentile believers and separated from them. To make matters worse, Peter’s improper behavior influenced other Jewish believers to separate from the Gentile as well. Even Barnabas was affected! So Paul had to rebuke Peter.

Doctrinal Points

1. Justification is not by the works of the Law.

Verses 15-18: “*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 faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.*”¹⁷ “*But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!*”¹⁸ *For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”*

Paul’s rebuke to Peter began in verse 14. The question is whether his remarks to Peter continued to the end of the chapter, or if the rest of the chapter were just Paul’s comments on the rebuke. We don’t know, because there are no quotation marks in the Greek language. In any case, Paul’s argument is recorded in Scripture, and thus it is the Word of God.

Justification means to be declared righteous before God. The “works of the Law” would be like keeping the Ten Commandments. Those are good works. Paul’s argument was clear: justification is **not** by the works of the Law: “*Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified*” (v16).

When the good news of justification by faith alone is preached (then and today), there are always some people who say: “That’s ‘cheap grace’! It can’t be that simple! That makes salvation too easy. On that basis, you could go out and sin, and

just do whatever you please. In fact, in that sense God would even be promoting sin!” Have you ever heard that argument? That’s exactly what the legalists of Paul’s day said - but this argument was refuted strongly in verse 17 by Paul’s emphatic, “**Certainly not!**”

The correct view is found in verse 18: if you put yourself back under the rule of the Law, and add the ritual of keeping the Law along with faith for salvation, you are once again **an unforgiven sinner!** Why? Because no one can keep the Law perfectly!

You cannot add good works to faith for justification because **God requires perfection.** Baptism and all good works must all **follow** justification – they are **not a means** to justification. If you’re not yet a Christian, you need to understand that you’re **not** saved by doing good works! Justification is not by the works of the Law.

2. Sanctification is not by the works of the Law.

Verses 19-21: “*For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.* ²⁰ *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* ²¹ *I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*”

Justification means to be declared righteous before God. Sanctification is the process of becoming more godly and holy as a Christian.

Our position and standing before a holy God is that we are not only justified - we are also sanctified. That’s our legal position before God as believers. That’s what Paul meant when he said, “*I have been crucified with Christ*” - because when Jesus Christ died as our substitute and representative, the believer died as well. That’s the way God sees our position: we died with Christ.

Furthermore, when Christ was resurrected, the believer was resurrected as well – and believers are now alive in Christ. This is our position before God. That’s how God sees us. Believers have died in Christ and are alive in Christ. Therefore, we have died to the Law, and are alive and free to live for the Lord (v19).

We deny this great truth if we put ourselves back under the Law and try and earn our salvation or work our way to Heaven. Jesus Christ did all the work, and God sees the believer **in Christ.** **The work of salvation is finished!** We’re already fully justified and sanctified. We’re free, not to sin, but to serve the Lord.

But as a believer, even though I’m justified and sanctified as to my position and standing before a holy and righteous God - I still sin. Now we move on to the subject of **practical sanctification.** Practical sanctification is our present state or situation – it’s not our “position” or “standing” before God. It’s our practice, not our position. So these verses cover our

practical sanctification as well. *“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.”*

If you have believed the gospel and trusted in Christ as your personal Savior, and thus became a Christian, how can you become more holy or sanctified or more like Jesus in a practical way? Should the aim and goal of the Christian life be striving with all your might to keep the Ten Commandments? Is this the way Christians get practical, everyday godly living? Some Christians think it is, but that’s really distorted biblical teaching.

The goal and aim of a Christian is to walk with the Lord and to live *“by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me.”* And here’s the good news: ***we have the ability to do this because we have new life in Christ*** (v20)! Christ lives in us! When we walk with the Lord, having the enabling power of the Holy Spirit, we become more holy and more godly, and we end up keeping the requirements of the Law much more than if we had tried to do so in our own strength.

That’s what Paul meant in Romans 8:4 when he wrote, *“The righteous requirement of the Law is fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”* Sanctification is not by the works of the Law.

Practical Application

Let a good marriage be an illustration of practical sanctification.

Marriage can be used to illustrate many biblical truths, and I think it’s a great illustration of practical sanctification. The Law says *“Thou shall not commit adultery.”* God’s Word declares that there is to be faithfulness in marriage.

Well then, what’s the best and surest way for a married couple to remain faithful to each other? Should we get up every morning and say, “I’m going to try with all my might today to keep the law and not commit adultery”? Should we set up legalistic rules, such as “There shall be no eye contact with any member of the opposite sex”?

No! The best and surest way to remain faithful to your marriage vows is to fall more in love with your husband or wife! If you’re in love with your spouse, keeping God’s law and doing God’s will for your marriage happens almost automatically.

Fall more in love with your Savior, who loved you and died for you (v20). Walk with Him daily. If you do those things, practical sanctification will take place in your life.

Think of your relationship with the Lord as a marriage. After all, the Church is the Bride of Christ. So let a good marriage be an illustration of practical sanctification.