

Galatians 2:11-21 “Freedom from Religion”

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Thesis: Is the way to be made right with God through faith in Christ, performance of the Mosaic Law, or both?

Until you appropriate and appreciate your identity in Jesus, you are likely to conclude performance of the law, or performance and faith. Today, we'll discover the way to please God is through living by faith in Jesus, and how to do it ...

Subject: Paul confronts Peter about the gospel

Object: Live by faith in Jesus

¹¹ 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?”

1. Confrontation for Christ [11-14]

Paul proves the truth of the gospel by showing how he even confronted the apostle Peter when he temporarily returned to observing Jewish ceremony to please God, and Peter repented from his hypocrisy. Peter had traveled from Jerusalem to Antioch (a town of ancient Syria, now in south-central Turkey) [11]. Paul confronted Peter, face-to-face, before all [14], because Peter *was to be blamed* [11]. What did Peter do? Peter had witnessed God's grace to Gentiles, and how the non-Jews had received the Holy Spirit by faith just like Jews at Pentecost. And Peter declared to the other apostles that God made no distinction between Jews and Gentiles [Ac. 10-11, cf. Ac. 2]. So, when Peter came to Antioch he regularly ate with Gentiles [12]. Remember, that based on Jewish tradition during the Old Testament [OT] Jews would not eat with non-Jews, because they believed they would be ceremonially defiled. Eating with someone is a symbol of unity. So, when the church at Antioch had agape feasts (i.e. pot-lucks) Peter would eat with Gentiles and they took communion together. However, when a delegation of Jewish believers sent to Antioch by James, the half-brother of Jesus and a leader of the church at Jerusalem, to see how things were going, Peter withdrew from the Gentiles [12]. Peter was afraid of ridicule or judgment from the Jewish believers. *The rest of the Jews, even (godly) Barnabas, were carried away with the hypocrisy* [13]. Hypocrisy relates to Greek actors wearing a mask to portray a mood or character, without revealing true self. And as we see, hypocrisy tends to be contagious.

Be willing to confront, with love, humility, and respect, doctrines that are false gospels.

Paul recognized the danger, *they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel and confronted Peter before all* [14]. Peter, and the other Jewish Christians were perverting the gospel by acting as though Gentiles

needed to become Jews and follow the Mosaic Law to be right with God and participate in gospel community.

Previously, Peter himself had understood and lived like someone who was no longer under the OT, now he was in effect *compelling Gentile to live as Jews* [14].

2. Justification by Christ [15-16] 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.

Paul makes clear that the Jews, who had received the Mosaic Law unlike the Gentiles [15], came to understand that *justification is by faith in Christ not works of the law* [16]. This is the essence of the gospel. **The term *justified*, appears three times in verse sixteen and refers to God's act of removing the guilt and penalty of sin while at the same time God's righteousness is credited to a believer's account through faith alone, without works [Is. 61:10, Rom. 5:1].** It is thus more than the idea that is "just as if it never happened. Similarly, three times in verse sixteen we see the terms *faith* or *believe* related to a commitment to Christ as the means of being justified. No amount of law-keeping can make a person right with God [16].

Biblical Christianity is distinct from every other belief system, religion, or philosophy, because the gospel reveals that we are made right with God by His grace through faith in Jesus. God sees you as righteous before Him as soon as you commit to Christ. You are forgiven of your sin, and given spiritual life through faith in Jesus.

In regard to your position you are sanctified or set-apart to God. In regard to practice, Jesus' followers grow in being set-apart and yielding to God's commands.

The doctrine of justification by faith is the cornerstone of the reformation begun by Martin Luther. We cannot be justified by our efforts, because we are all infected and impure with sin, and our righteous deeds apart from Christ are like filthy rags before God [Is. 64:6].

3. Identification with Christ [17-21]

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.”

The way to please God is to live by faith in Jesus, but how can you do it? Someone might contend that since we still sin after committing to Jesus, that the gospel and justification by faith is inadequate. Paul emphatically

refutes the idea when He declares, ” *is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!*” [17]. Paul says, “*For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor*” [18]. In essence, if you try to relate to God by works apart from Jesus you’re a bigger sinner since there is no forgiveness and no changed heart.

Live for God [19] *For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.* The law condemns. In essence, the Mosaic Law reveals God’s standard of moral perfection, and that we cannot measure up. Thus, we deserve God’s judgment or death. In Christ, we in effect acknowledge our death, so that we live for God. You die to self-righteousness, and trying to earn or prove that you deserve God’s favor by receiving Christ’s righteousness and living for God. **You yield to God’s commands because you’ve discovered that God is good, and His boundaries are best for you.**

Live by faith in Christ [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.* You are dead to the law by being crucified with Christ. When you commit to Jesus, you identify with Jesus’ death and resurrection. We are to treat our old flesh nature as dead, crucified with Christ, and our new spiritual nature now lives through faith in Christ.

Jesus lives through you as you commit to Him.

Paul declares, *Christ loved me and gave Himself for me*, to urge us to remember the cross where God's love is proven beyond a doubt, and the personal nature of God's love [Jn. 15: 13].

Live in grace [21] *I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.*” If you could to be right with God through religious ritual, performance of a code, or great morality then there would be no need for Jesus to die on the cross [Mt. 26:39-44]. Trying to be right with God by your efforts, in effect declares Christ's death was unnecessary for your salvation. Thus, Paul did not set aside the grace of God.

Identification with Christ and His gospel has practical implications for life: Your performance is not the basis of God's love, delight, or blessings. Thus, God does not stop loving, delighting or blessing when your performance is hindered nor does God owe you when your performance appears stellar. Furthermore, everything else that you look to for identity, such as a relationship, spouse, children, accomplishments, career, wealth or possessions is unstable and you ultimately will be separated from. Living in grace, through faith in Christ, and identification with Christ is the true source of contentment.

Communion: live by faith in Jesus

Study Guide Qs

Q1. What would you say to someone who believes they will go to heaven because they are a “good” or “moral” person?

Q2. Have you ever had the experience of needing to confront someone about their belief in, or proclaiming of a false gospel? What happened? How would you like to handle that situation in the future?

Q3. If people are justified solely by faith in Christ what is the value of obeying God’s commands?

Q4. How has identification with Christ and His gospel impacted your life?

Digging Deeper

1. Here is a link to a great article regarding the importance of justification by faith [https://](https://www.gotquestions.org/justification-by-faith.html)

www.gotquestions.org/justification-by-faith.html.

2. Here is a link to an excellent article on the relationship of faith, works, and security in salvation: [https://](https://www.gotquestions.org/faith-works-security.html)

www.gotquestions.org/faith-works-security.html.