

# “Justification by Faith Alone”

(Galatians 2:11-21 ~ Part 2)

## Introduction

- At the heart of the 16th century Protestant Reformation were five tenets or slogans now referred to as “The Five Solas.” These Five Solas are: 1) Sola Scriptura (from Scripture alone), 2) Sola Gratia (by grace alone), 3) Sola Fide (through faith alone), 4) Solus Christus (in Christ alone), and 5) Soli Deo Gloria (for the glory of God alone). Together these Five Solas helped frame the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century, and serve as pillars of truth within Protestant Evangelicalism today.
- Perhaps, the importance of the word “sola” is often overlooked. While its definition is straightforward (Latin for “only or “alone”) its importance within these five “essential” truths cannot be overstated. There are many religions and faiths that would proudly profess their love for Scripture, their belief in the importance of grace, faith and Christ for salvation, and even their desire to glorify God. But when you insert the word “sola” you draw a sharp line of distinction. For these five solas do not simply declare the importance of these truths, but the all-important exclusivity of these truths.

In other words, as Protestant Christians, we not only teach that the Bible a sacred book, but that it is the only source of the divinely inspired, infallible and authoritative Word God (apart from Popes, church authority, or any other sacred writings); we not only teach that God’s grace is a vital part of our salvation, but that it is God’s grace alone that can save (apart from any human merit); we not only teach that faith is a means to being saved, but that we are saved through faith alone (apart from any good works); we not only teach that Christ is the Savior, but that Christ alone is the one and only Savior (apart from any other so-called saviors or any other means of salvation); likewise we not only teach that glorifying God is one of our many passions and desires, but that living for the glory God is our only supreme passion and desire.

*We believe, by the revelation (authority) of Scripture alone,  
that a person is saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone,  
in Christ alone, and to the glory of God alone.*

- While these Five Solas are indelibly tied together, the heart of its declaration is that a person is saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. This is the doctrine that the apostle Paul was defending in his letter to the “*churches of Galatia*” (1:2). Specifically, the doctrine of the sinner being justified by faith (in Christ) alone. That is, the only means by which a person can be saved is through faith in Jesus Christ – not by any “conditional” or “additional” human works. Salvation is all of God’s grace and cannot be merited in any way – it can only be received by faith. Sola Fide (through faith alone) teaches that God’s saving grace can only be received through faith (believing) in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. While there are many Scriptures that declare this sacred truth, here are a few that are especially clear and concise:

**Rom 3:27-30** ~ “Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup>Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup>since God is one – who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.”

**Rom 4:5** ~ “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness”

**Rom 5:1** ~ “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Phil 3:8-9** ~ “Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”

➤ The doctrine of *sola fide* is at the heart of the Gospel. In fact, without it there is no Gospel (only a false gospel, a “different” and “distort[ed]” gospel; 1:6). The apostle Paul was a preacher and defender of the (true) Gospel. He defended it against the attacks of false teachers, false apostles, and false Christians. He even defended it against those who were deceived, ignorant or misguided. He even defended it against the apostle Peter who, in the moment, acted as if the gospel was (at least, in part) by works.

**Gal 2:11-21** ~ “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup>For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup>And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup>But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, ‘If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?’ <sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. <sup>17</sup>But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.”

➤ In this passage of Scripture, we discover Peter’s offense against the Gospel (vs.11-13), and Paul’s defense of the Gospel (vs.14-21).

#### A. Peter’s Offense against the Gospel (vs.11-13)

➤ Both Peter and Paul were godly and faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. Both were specifically chosen and anointed by Christ to be His apostles. Both were tremendously influential leaders in the early days of the New Testament church (after Jesus’ ascension, and the Day of Pentecost). In fact, the book of Acts essentially covers both of their ministries – Peter (Acts 1-12), Paul (Acts 13-28). But at this particularly point in history, their paths crossed and there was conflict – not a conflict of personalities, ministry philosophies, or leadership authority, but concerning the doctrine of (and application of) the Gospel of Jesus Christ. These verses (vs.11-13) unfold in five distinct stages.

##### 1. The Occasion (vs.11)

➤ Once again, at the outset of this passage, we see the apostle Paul referred to the apostle Peter as “*Cephas*” (vs.11; the term Cephas means “rock” in Aramaic, which is translated “Peter” in Greek). Paul often referred to the apostle Peter, in Aramaic, as “Cephas” (see Gal.1:18; 2:9, 11, 14; cf. 1Cor.1:12; 3:22; 9:5; 15:5). When Jesus began His public ministry, calling those who would be His disciples/apostles, He changed Peter’s name from Simon to Cephas (Jn.1:39-42).

➤ This occasion happened when Peter “*came to Antioch*” (vs.11). Located some 300 miles north of Jerusalem (on the eastern coast of the Mediterranean Sea), Antioch was the capital of the Roman province of Syria (estimated population of 250,000 – 500,000). There is no definitive information in Scripture as to why, or when, Peter made his way to Antioch (or how long he stayed there).

##### 2. The Confrontation (vs.11)

➤ We do know, however, that during this time when Peter was in Antioch with Paul that Paul “*opposed him to his face*” (vs.11). As we will see, Paul needed to confront Peter on the spot as Peter was not acting in accord with the Gospel of Jesus Christ (see vs.12, 14). As Paul explained, the reason why he confronted Peter “to his face” was because Peter “*stood condemned*” (vs.11). This does not imply that Peter was unsaved, or lost his salvation, but simply that Peter was guilty of sin.

### 3. The Transgression (vs.12)

- Paul explained: *“For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself”* (vs.12). When Jews (the Judaizers) arrived, Peter ostracized the Gentiles. At best Peter was guilty of showing favoritism (Jms.2:1), at worst he was guilty of compromising Gospel/Biblical truths (for sake of worldly comfort and social privilege. As the context of this passage indicates, Peter was guilty of the latter if not also the former.

Falling back into his old patterns, Peter distanced himself from the Gentiles as if they were “unclean” or unsaved (see Acts 10:9-16). Remember, Peter was specifically called to be an apostle to the Jews (vs.8, 9). He lived, worked and ministered in predominantly Jewish territory (in Jerusalem). Therefore, the Gentiles were largely foreign to him, and their influence on his life paled in comparison to the influence of the Jews. The temptation to align himself with Jews (or Judaizers) would have been great.

### 4. The Motivation (vs.12)

- Further, we see that Peter’s actions were motivated by fear: *“fearing the circumcision party”* (vs.12). The *“circumcision party”* (or lit. “those of the circumcision”) referred to not just Jews, but those known as the “Judaizers” (see Acts 11:1-3; 15:5). These were men who tried to force Gentile Christians to be circumcised, believing that Gentiles had to ascribe to Judaism in order to be saved. Peter’s distancing himself from the Gentiles does not reveal a change in his doctrine/theology – he had not changed his view of the Gospel – but rather revealed the fragility of his faith, especially concerning those who could negatively and directly impact his life and ministry.
- Ironically, but not surprisingly, the fear that compelled Peter to shun the Gentile Christians at Antioch was the same fear that compelled the Judaizers to embrace and proclaim a false (legalistic) gospel:

**Gal 6:12** ~ “It is those who want to make a good showing in the flesh who would force you to be circumcised, and only in order that they may not be persecuted for the cross of Christ.”

- Fear is a powerful motivator: it can cause us to compromise our principles, or succumb to temptation; it can cause us to deny our faith, or renounce Jesus as our Lord and Savior; it can compel us to betray our loved ones, or sacrifice that which we love most; it can motivate us to be silent when we should speak up, or say that which we should not; it can cause us to wallow in anxiety, and doubt/distrust the sovereignty of God; it can cause us to cower and yield to those who are enemies of the Gospel.

### 5. The Repercussion (vs.13)

- The repercussions of Peter’s actions were immediate and serious: *“And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy”* (vs.13). Being a leader in the church, Peter’s withdrawal from the Gentile Christians caused other Jewish Christians to separate from them.

## B. Paul’s Defense of the Gospel (vs.14-21)

- After confronting Peter (*“to his face”*; vs.11) for his hypocrisy in the Gospel (vs.13), Paul declared the truth of the Gospel to Peter (*“before them all”*; vs.14). Again, Paul was not attacking Peter in as much as he was defending the Gospel. Paul had no animosity toward Peter, there was no axe to grind or personality conflict. Paul was vehemently defending the Gospel against a blatant (although not malicious) attack. This was not something that Paul could, in all good conscience, ignore – especially since the Galatian Christians were so easily (gullibly) deceived by the false gospel of legalism. These verses (vs.14-21), we can be outlined with three major headings.

## 1. The Admonition (vs.14)

➤ Again, Paul described what Peter (and “*the rest of the [Christian] Jews ... even Barnabas*”; vs.13) did as hypocrisy (“*hypocritically ... hypocrisy*”; vs.13). In other words, “*their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel*” (vs.14). This is the very basis of all hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is not struggling to live the Christian life, but being insincere or duplicitous in one’s Christian walk. It is not (just) failing to be perfect (Jms.3:2), but failing to be consistent or faithful. There is a difference between (sometimes, temporarily) acting hypocritically, and (always, totally) being a hypocrite.

By simple definition, hypocrisy is pretending to act in a way that is inconsistent/contrary to how you believe – pretending to be someone you are not [note: the word “hypocrite” comes from the Greek word (*hypokritēs*) describing an actor in a play].

Gal 2:14 ~ “But when I saw that they were not behaving consistently with the truth of the gospel” (NET)

Gal 2:14 ~ “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel” (NASB)

Gal 2:14 ~ “But when I saw that they were deviating from the truth of the gospel” (HCSB)

Gal 2:14 ~ “But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel” (KJV)

➤ Paul was not accusing Peter of being a non-Christian, but admonishing him for being duplicitous – of not correctly applying the truth of the Gospel. Hypocrisy is not “the unforgivable sin.” It is, however, a sin (see vs.11, 17, 18), and can be a sign of unbelief (see Matt.15:7-9). Jesus regularly condemned hypocrites, making it clear that hypocrisy is something that we must take very seriously (see Matt.23:13, 15, 23, 25, 27, 29).

Paul was right to admonish Peter’s hypocrisy (see Gal.6:1; Matt.18:15-17). Peter, by withdrawing from the Gentile Christians – out of fear of the Judaizers (vs.12) – was indeed acting hypocritically. His behavior was inconsistent with, contrary to, what he believed.

✓ Illust: This should serve as a sobering reminder to us all; that we are not guilty of behaving contrary to what we believe, or living the Christian life only when it is easy, convenient or popular. This temptation is not reserved only for young people. From time to time all Christians can feel the pressure to act hypocritically, and the lure of hypocrisy.

➤ Since Peter’s sinful actions were public, and leading others astray (vs.13), Paul confronted him “*before them all*” (vs.14; see vs.11). This illustrates the common and helpful maxim, “Public sins require public confession/repentance.”

➤ Paul admonished Peter by saying, “*If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?*” (vs.14). In other words, Paul declared Peter guilty of a double-standard. While Peter eagerly lived “*like a Gentile*” (vs.14), in not observing Jewish traditions and restrictions (i.e. “*eating with ... Gentiles*”, vs.12), he was acting as if the Gentiles needed to adopt such Jewish customs (to “*live like Jews*”, vs.14).

Again, it is important to point out that the Gospel knows no age, racial, gender or social restrictions. Jews do not have to live like Gentiles, and Gentiles do not have to live like Jews. A person is saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone. Seeking to make someone conform to a particular ethnicity, culture or customs in order to be saved is legalism – a distorted, corrupted, false gospel.

**Col 3:11** ~ “Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.”

## 2. The Proclamation (vs.15-16)

- In writing, *“We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners”* (vs.15), Paul was not discriminating against the Gentiles, nor was he stating that Jews are not sinners. Clearly, as we read in the Scriptures, both Jews and Gentiles – all human beings – are sinners and can only be saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ Jesus as Lord and Savior.

**Gal 3:26-29** ~ “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. <sup>27</sup>For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. <sup>28</sup>There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. <sup>29</sup>And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s offspring, heirs according to promise.”

**Gal 5:4** ~ “For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.”

**Rom 3:9-10** ~ “What then? Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin, <sup>10</sup>as it is written: ‘None is righteous, no, not one’” [cf. Ps.14:1-3]

- This somewhat cryptic statement is simply making an obvious distinction between Jews and Gentiles – following up on the point he made in verse fourteen. Namely, that Jews are God’s chosen people and that Gentiles are outside of God’s covenant with Israel. Since both Peter and Paul were born as Jews, they were blessed to be recipient of God’s covenant promises (see Rom.3:1-4; 11:11-24; Eph.2:11-22), which initially excluded the Gentiles – although God always intended to save that Jews and Gentiles would be saved by faith (again, the Old Testament saints were saved by their faith in a Messiah who was to come, and the New Testament saints are saved by their faith in a Messiah who has come).

**Rom 1:16** ~ “For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.”

Rom 9:6-7 ~ “But it is not as though the word of God has failed. For not all who are descended from Israel belong to Israel, <sup>7</sup>and not all are children of Abraham ...”

- Verse sixteen is the central theme of the whole book of Galatians, and the crux of the Gospel: *“yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified”* (vs.16). As we have seen (and said) now many times, a person is saved by God’s grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This Gospel truth is replete throughout all of Scripture. Here are some examples that are abundantly clear:

**Eph 2:5, 8-9** ~ “even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved ... <sup>8</sup>For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, <sup>9</sup>not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”

**Titus 3:5** ~ “[God] saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit”

**2 Tim 1:9** ~ “who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began”

**Rom 11:6** ~ “But if it is by grace, it is no longer on the basis of works; otherwise grace would no longer be grace.”

- Understanding the word *“justified”* (*dikaioō*) is of utmost importance as we seek to understand the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. This word is used thirty-nine times in the New Testament (eight times in Galatians); the vast majority of NT usage is by the apostle Paul (about 70%). The word means “to be declared righteous” or “to be counted just (innocent).”

To be justified before God is not something that is earned (by us), but something that is declared (by God). The sinner is declared righteous by God based solely on their faith in Jesus Christ, not at all based on their moral goodness or religious works. In verse sixteen we read, *“we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ”* (vs.16).

God declares repentant (believing) sinners to be just after He has imputed to them the righteousness of Christ (and imputed onto Christ their unrighteousness). The repentant believer is declared righteous by God not on the basis of their own works or merit, but solely on the basis of the righteous work of Christ. This complete and eternal righteousness comes to all those who truly put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

**2 Cor 5:21** ~ “For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

➤ It is important to note that ‘saving faith’ refers to the object of your faith (i.e. Jesus Christ), not the degree of your faith or even the act of faith itself. To be sure, faith has degrees. That is to say, faith can vary in depth, maturity and strengths. The essence of saving faith, however, is not in the amount or depth of a person’s faith – it is a faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Saving faith is not a faith in faith. The power of saving faith is not in the action of believing or even in the maturity of one’s belief. The power of saving faith is based solely and completely upon the Savior in whom the believer puts their belief and trust.

✓ Illust: Theologian B.B. Warfield put it this way: “The *saving power* of faith resides not in itself, but in the Almighty Saviour on whom it rests... It is not faith that saves, but faith in Jesus Christ... It is not, strictly speaking, even faith in Christ that saves, but Christ that saves through faith. The saving power resides exclusively, not in the act of faith or the attitude of faith or the nature of faith, but in the object of faith... We could not more radically misconceive it than by transferring to faith even the smallest fraction of that saving energy which is attributed in the Scriptures wholly to Christ himself” (quoted in *After Darkness, Light*, p.87).

➤ A person’s justification before God is based solely on their faith in Christ – not by any inherent goodness or external works of righteousness, but only in the full and finished work of Christ through His sinless life, substitutionary death, and resurrection from the dead. Personalizing what he had just written (in vs.16a), Paul declared: *“so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified”* (vs.16b).

✓ Illust: “Three times in Galatians 2:16 Paul declares that salvation is only through faith in Christ and not by law. The first statement is general: *a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus.* The second is personal: *even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law.* The third is universal: *by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified* (cf. Ps.143:2). All three affirm the same great reality. ... First Paul establishes it on the basis of his apostolic authority. Second, he establishes it on the basis of his own experience. And third, he establishes it on the basis of God’s Word in the Old Testament” (John MacArthur; *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: Galatians*; 2:15-16).

➤ This is exactly what the apostle Paul states repeatedly in his letter to the Romans:

**Rom 3:20-23** ~ “Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin. <sup>21</sup>But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. <sup>22</sup>This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, <sup>23</sup>for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God”

**Rom 3:27-4:5** ~ “Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith. <sup>28</sup>For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law. <sup>29</sup>Is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles too? Yes, of Gentiles too,

<sup>30</sup>since there is only one God, who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through that same faith. <sup>31</sup>Do we, then, nullify the law by this faith? Not at all! Rather, we uphold the law.  
<sup>4:1</sup>What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? <sup>2</sup>If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. <sup>3</sup>What does the Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ <sup>4</sup>Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup>However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” (cf. Gen.15:6)

Gal 3:21-22 ~ “Is the law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law.

<sup>22</sup>But the Scripture declares that the whole world is a prisoner of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.” (cf. Gal.3:1-20)

➤ Almost immediately, some people reject the doctrine of “faith alone” because they are fearful that people – after hearing that works of obedience will not and cannot save them – may outright refuse to obey Christ. I have heard it said, “If you do not make works mandatory for salvation, most people will not obey Christ. But, among other things, this completely undermines the transforming (sanctifying) work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of those who truly receive Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (see Gal.5:16-26; Col.3:10; Tit.3:5; Heb.10:14-18).

There is another problem with this fearful reaction to the doctrine of “faith alone.” For it implies (if not explicitly argues) that the main (or only) reason Christians obey God is to obtain or maintain their salvation (not purely out of their love for and devotion to Christ Jesus). But the true (mature) Christian loves Christ and sincerely seeks to be pleasing in His sight – apart from any reward, and above any benefit (Jn.14:15; 15:14; cf. Rom.6:1-14; 2Cor.5:17-21; 1Jn.2:1-6).

➤ In his letter to the Christians in Rome, Paul would make it clear that “*the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good*” (Rom.7:12; cf. Rom.7:14; Ps.19:7-12). But the law cannot save, it only condemns, “*because by works of the law no one will be justified*” (vs.15-16). Through the law we come to understand that we are sinners, in desperate need of God’s saving mercy, grace and love. The law reveals our sinfulness (lawlessness), but it cannot remove or remedy our sin.

### 3. The Explanation (vs.17-21)

➤ Paul further explains his Gospel-proclamation by making some elementary (reasonable) arguments. “*But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!*” (vs.17). As he so often did, Paul is teaching from the extremes. He took things to their logical (illogical) conclusion in order to show their validity (invalidity). This is certainly no exception. Paul was essentially saying (again) that if seeking to be saved by faith alone is sinful (by abandoning Jewish ceremonial laws), then Christ would have to be “*a servant of sin*” (vs.17) – for Christ (Jesus) would be guilty of promoting and practicing a false gospel.

To show the absurdity of such a claim, Paul quickly answered his own rhetorical question with the strongest negative phrase in the New Testament: “*Certainly not!*” (vs.17; *mē ginomai*). This phrase could literally be translated “may it never be” [“absolutely not” (NET), “God forbid” (KJV)]. Here are some examples of how Paul elsewhere used this intense negation:

**Gal 3:21** ~ “Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! ...”

**Rom 6:1-2** ~ “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? <sup>2</sup>By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?”

**Rom 6:15** ~ “What then? Are we to sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!”

**Rom 7:7** ~ “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. ...”

**Rom 9:14** ~ “What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God’s part? By no means!”

**Rom 11:1** ~ “I ask, then, has God rejected his people? By no means! ...”

- Clearly, Paul is not accusing Jesus as being a sinner or the servant of sin. He is logically proving that legalism is contrary to the Gospel and contrary to Christ. Paul went on to write, *“<sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor”* (vs.18). In other words, if a person is to be saved by keeping the law (i.e. the Jewish ceremonial laws) everyone is a sinner, without hope of salvation, because they need to keep the whole law perfectly (Gal.3:10; 5:3; Jms.2:10). Logically, a person is either saved by keeping the law or saved by faith alone; it cannot be both, or even a mixture of the two.
- No one is saved by their own righteousness (either in part or in whole). Paul further explained this point: *“For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God”* (vs.19; see Rom.7:5-25; 1Cor.15:56). Now, by personal testimony, Paul is declaring that he was saved out of the “false gospel” of legalism (self-righteousness) in order that he would live – by faith in Christ, and His righteousness – for the glory of God.

**Phil 3:2-9** ~ “Look out for the dogs, look out for the evildoers, look out for those who mutilate the flesh. <sup>3</sup>For we are the circumcision, who worship by the Spirit of God and glory in Christ Jesus and put no confidence in the flesh – <sup>4</sup>though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless. <sup>7</sup>But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup>Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith”

- The spiritual death that Paul died, and that every true Christian dies, is being *“crucified with Christ”* (vs.20). That is, they are ultimately dependent upon Christ’s substitutionary death – His imputed righteousness (Is.53:4-6; 2Cor.5:21) – for their salvation.

The result is, in the words of the apostle Paul, *“It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me”* (vs.20). Paul was no longer living in the futile attempt of seeking to gain, or maintain, his salvation by works. He is now completely identified with, and compelled by, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ (see Rom.6:4-6; 1Cor.2:2). As a Christian, he now lived for the pleasure and glory of Christ (1Cor.10:31).

**Gal 5:24** ~ “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

**Gal 6:14** ~ “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.”

- Paul then gave this sobering summary: *“I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose”* (vs.21; 5:4). In other words, if a person could be saved by their own goodness, or good works, then Jesus would not have had to come to earth to die on the cross (see Gal.5:4).
- ✓ Illust: “Did Christ die, or did He not die? Was His death worth while, or was it not? If His death was worth while, it follows that righteousness does not come by the Law. Why was Christ born anyway? Why was He crucified? Why did He suffer? Why did He love me and give Himself for me? It was all done to no purpose if righteousness is to be had by the Law.

Or do you think that God spared not His Son, but delivered Him for us all, for the fun of it? Before I would admit anything like that, I would consign the holiness of the saints and of the angels to hell.

To reject the grace of God is a common sin, of which everybody is guilty who sees any righteousness in himself or in his deeds. ...

We will always affirm with Paul that either Christ died in vain, or else the Law cannot justify us. But Christ did not suffer and die in vain. Hence, the Law does not justify” (Martin Luther, *Luther’s Commentary on Galatians*; 2:21).

## Conclusion

➤ Let me close with a powerful illustration of the Gospel from Scripture:

**Matt 15:21-28** ~ “And Jesus went away from there and withdrew to the district of Tyre and Sidon. <sup>22</sup>And behold, a Canaanite woman from that region came out and was crying, ‘Have mercy on me, O Lord, Son of David; my daughter is severely oppressed by a demon.’ <sup>23</sup>But he did not answer her a word. And his disciples came and begged him, saying, ‘Send her away, for she is crying out after us.’ <sup>24</sup>He answered, ‘I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel.’ <sup>25</sup>But she came and knelt before him, saying, ‘Lord, help me.’ <sup>26</sup>And he answered, ‘It is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ <sup>27</sup>She said, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.’ <sup>28</sup>Then Jesus answered her, ‘O woman, great is your faith! Be it done for you as you desire.’ And her daughter was healed instantly.”

Mark 7:24-30 ~ “And from there he arose and went away to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And he entered a house and did not want anyone to know, yet he could not be hidden. <sup>25</sup>But immediately a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit heard of him and came and fell down at his feet. <sup>26</sup>Now the woman was a Gentile, a Syrophenician by birth. And she begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter. <sup>27</sup>And he said to her, ‘Let the children be fed first, for it is not right to take the children’s bread and throw it to the dogs.’ <sup>28</sup>But she answered him, ‘Yes, Lord; yet even the dogs under the table eat the children’s crumbs.’ <sup>29</sup>And he said to her, ‘For this statement you may go your way; the demon has left your daughter.’ <sup>30</sup>And she went home and found the child lying in bed and the demon gone.”

➤ This Gentile woman (a social and religious outcast in her day) saw herself as totally undeserving and unworthy of God’s grace and mercy, yet she understood that God (Christ) is abundantly gracious and merciful [notice she referred to Jesus as “Lord” and “Son of David” (vs.22)]. She understood that she was outside of God’s covenant with Israel, and yet she believed that she (by faith) was included in God’s saving grace (Rom.1:16; 5:1). While Jesus’ words may seem calloused and unkind, we see that He was testing her faith. She was persistent in her belief, as Scripture foretold (Gen.12:3), that God’s (saving) grace extends to Gentiles as well as Jews (Rom.1:16). Jesus commended her “*great ... faith*” and healed her daughter instantly.

**Gal 3:8-9** ~ “And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘In you shall all the nations be blessed.’ <sup>9</sup>So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (see Gen.12:3)

➤ The Gospel Jesus Christ is neither irrelevant or antiquated, and we must not seek to redefine or minimize its divine truth. It is not only through this Gospel that we are saved, but in this Gospel we live. We are called to live Gospel-centered lives – giving God all the praise and glory for our salvation, and living our lives for the praise and glory of God. As Christians, we must be resolved to proclaim this precious Gospel truth: “We believe, by the revelation (authority) of Scripture alone, that a person is saved by God’s grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and to the glory of God alone.”