

## **Justified by Faith** Galatians 2: 11-21

Our text today reveals Paul's continued struggle with the legalistic Judaizers and their expectations regarding salvation. The Judaizers refused to accept salvation by faith alone in Christ alone. Unfortunately, their influence affected the early ministry of Peter and others who proclaimed the true gospel. While Peter preached the truth, he was guilty of seeking to accommodate the Judaizers at times rather than confront their false doctrine.

The focus of the text is foundational to our Christian faith. Within this passage, Paul beautifully defends salvation by faith in Christ alone, apart from any works of man. Many seek to add to the gospel, but Paul argues biblically that salvation is based in personal faith in the finished work of Christ. He refused to appease the Judaizers in their quest of adding works to faith. In fact, Paul adamantly opposed such doctrine and exposed this doctrine as contrary to the gospel.

As we examine the [directives](#) Paul gives in the text, I want to consider the foundational truth of: [Justified by Faith](#).

### **I. The Confrontation with Peter** (11-13)

**A. The Dispute** (11) – [But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.](#) After Paul returned to Antioch from Jerusalem with Barnabas, Peter came to Antioch and met with Paul. Paul wasted no time confronting Peter regarding his accommodation of the Judaizers. As we will discuss, Peter had hindered his reputation and effectiveness with Gentile believers due to his actions and Paul wasted no time rebuking him. He was not going to allow such behavior in Antioch, possibly hindering the furtherance of the gospel. (While confrontation is never easy, there are times when it is warranted and necessary. We must be willing to stand boldly for truth, regardless of the situation or who is involved.)

**B. The Disparity** (12) – [For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.](#) Peter's interaction and association with Gentile believers was heavily influenced by those present at the time. He gladly fellowshiped with the Gentiles when no one was around, but when influential people for Jerusalem were present, Peter shunned them. Paul declares Peter's behavior was based on fear of the Judaizers rather than obedience to God.

➤ Unfortunately, such behavior continues within the church today. These actions certainly are displeasing to the Lord. We are all one body, born again in Christ, serving the same Lord, and will spend eternity together. There is no room within the church for prejudice or partiality regarding those of like faith. We cannot allow matters of race, social/economic status, or prior backgrounds to create division and segregation within the body of Christ. [Gal.3:28 – There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.](#)

**C. The Dilemma** (13) – [And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation](#) (hypocrisy). Peter's behavior was detrimental enough in itself, but his actions also encouraged others to behave in the same manner. Barnabas, the man serving alongside Paul in reaching the Gentiles with the gospel, also began to engage in such hypocrisy and prejudice. Paul knew, left unchecked, such behavior would greatly hinder their ability to reach the Gentiles with the gospel. This had to be stopped immediately.

➤ There are many truths that can be discerned from Paul's confrontation with Peter. One that rises from the text needs to be understood – situational ethics are often contrary to biblical ethics. One must stand upon the truth, regardless of the situation or audience. There are not many gospels, given for specific circumstances, but one true gospel that transcends all boundaries. As we encounter such behaviors or false doctrine, we must confront it and stand for truth.

**II. The Exhortation of Truth** (14-21) – Following his description of Peter's error, Paul defends the truth of the gospel and exhorts all who hear to submit to this truth. Notice:

**A. The Challenge** (14) – [But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?](#) Paul publicly challenged Peter regarding his treatment of the Gentiles. Although Peter was a Jew, he did not live according to the false teachings of the Judaizers. If he lived like the Gentiles in matters of faith, why would he expect the Gentiles to live in a way that he knew was contrary to the faith? Paul had no desire to humiliate Peter, but to confront the blatant hypocrisy he displayed toward the Gentiles. (We must never expect more from others than we are willing to engage ourselves, particularly in matters of faith. If we are planning to expose the splinter in another's eye, we better be certain there isn't a log in ours!)

**B. The Confidence** (15-16) – [We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,](#) <sup>16</sup> [Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in](#)

Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. If anyone should have believed Jesus was the Christ, and been willing to rest in His finished work by faith, it would be the Jews. However, many of them who embraced Judaism refused to accept salvation by faith alone. This was an attack on the foundational truths of the gospel. *In effect, Paul was saying, “Peter, I am rebuking you because you are violating the cardinal truth of Christianity. By your behavior you are condoning works-righteousness, a system of legalism that is contrary even to the covenant given by Moses, not to mention the New Covenant given by our Lord Jesus Christ.”*<sup>i</sup>

➤ Paul adamantly affirmed that salvation was by faith in Christ alone, apart from any works of the law. One is not justified based on their works – justification is received through faith in Christ. Any other doctrine is a false gospel. Any effort to obtain justification other than by faith in Christ is futile and will result in the seeker remaining unrighteous before the Father. We are justified by faith, not by works.

**C. The Clarity** (17-18) – *But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.*<sup>18</sup> *For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.* In order to provide clarity, Paul offered a rhetorical question – if through my efforts to obtain righteousness through works of the law, I remain in my sin, is Christ to be blamed – is He the minister of sin? Is the message of the gospel, delivered by Christ, contrary to God’s plan to redeem fallen humanity? God forbid! If once knowing the truth of the gospel, (justification by faith in Christ alone), one returns to seeking righteousness through works of the flesh, we transgress the truth of the gospel and engage in sin.

➤ We are not saved by works of the law or the flesh, and our salvation is not maintained by works. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ and we are kept by grace through faith in Christ. I did not work to earn my salvation and I am not expected to work in order to keep my salvation. Works will naturally follow salvation in one whose heart is right with God, but our salvation does not rest in our works.

**D. The Conformity** (19-21) – *For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.*<sup>20</sup> *I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*<sup>21</sup> *I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.* Paul reveals his life has been conformed to Christ in salvation by faith. Paul had died to the old man of sin – the man condemned by the law, and he was now made alive in Christ. While the law could reveal the righteousness of God and the depravity of man, the law was unable to save. Through faith in Christ, he had been made alive in Him, delivered from the condemnation of the law.

➤ The flesh, (the old man and his desires), were crucified with Christ, and yet Paul was alive in Christ. However, Paul declares that it isn't he who lives, but Christ lives within him. The life he now enjoys is Christ living through him. The life he now lives is lived by faith alone in the Son of God who loved him and gave Himself as the atoning sacrifice on the cross to purchase Paul's redemption. (The same is true for every believer. We are alive in Christ, but not apart from Him. Once we were saved, we were placed within the body – we abide in the vine. The life we now live is lived in Christ as He lives in us.)

➤ Once again, Paul condemns the message of the Judaizers and their demand of adherence to the law. He is not willing to frustrate (*to invalidate*) the grace of God. Paul affirms that if righteousness is obtained by the law, then Christ died in vain. *The two pillars of the gospel are the **grace of God** and the death of **Christ**, and those are the two pillars that, by its very nature, legalism destroys. The person who insists that he can earn salvation by his own efforts undermines the very foundation of Christianity and nullifies the precious death of Christ on his behalf.* <sup>ii</sup>

**Conclusion:** This passage presents two significant challenges – may we stand boldly for the truth of the gospel, without compromise regardless of the situation, and may we continue to be conformed to the image of Christ, living boldly for Him by faith alone. Apart from Him we can do nothing, but with Christ in us, we can do all things.

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<sup>i</sup> John F. MacArthur Jr., [Galatians](#), MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1983), 55.

<sup>ii</sup> Ibid, 60.