

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON THIRTY-TWO)**

### **“CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST” (PART 4)**

#### **GALATIANS 2:11-21**

##### **(THE MESSAGE)**

*11 Later, when Peter came to Antioch, I had a face-to-face confrontation with him because he was clearly out of line.*

*12 Here's the situation. Earlier, before certain persons had come from James, Peter regularly ate with the non-Jews. But when that conservative group came from Jerusalem, he cautiously pulled back and put as much distance as he could manage between himself and his non-Jewish friends. That's how fearful he was of the conservative Jewish clique that's been pushing the old system of circumcision.*

*13 Unfortunately, the rest of the Jews in the Antioch church joined in that hypocrisy so that even Barnabas was swept along in the charade.*

*14 But when I saw that they were not maintaining a steady, straight course according to the Message, I spoke up to Peter in front of them all: “If you, a Jew, live like a non-Jew when you're not being observed by the watchdogs from Jerusalem, what right do you have to require non-Jews to conform to Jewish customs just to make a favorable impression on your old Jerusalem cronies?”*

*15 We Jews know that we have no advantage of birth over “non-Jewish sinners.”*

*16 We know very well that we are not set right with God by rule-keeping but only through personal faith in Jesus Christ. How do we know? We tried it — and we had the best system of rules the world has ever seen! Convinced that no human being can please God by self-improvement, we believed in Jesus as the Messiah so that we might be set right before God by trusting in the Messiah, not by trying to be good.*

*17 Have some of you noticed that we are not yet perfect? (No great surprise, right?) And are you ready to make the accusation that since people like me, who go through Christ in order to get things right with God, aren't perfectly virtuous, Christ must therefore be an accessory to sin? The accusation is frivolous.*

*18 If I was “trying to be good,” I would be rebuilding the same old barn that I tore down. I would be acting as a charlatan.*

*19 What actually took place is this: I tried keeping rules and working my head off to please God, and it didn't work. So I quit being a “law man” so that I could be God's man.*

*20 Christ's life showed me how, and enabled me to do it. I identified myself completely with him. Indeed, I have been crucified with Christ. My ego is no longer central. It is no longer important that I appear righteous before you or have your good opinion, and I am no longer driven to impress God. Christ lives in me. The life you see me living is not “mine,” but it is lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

*21 I am not going to go back on that. Is it not clear to you that to go back to that old rule-keeping, peer-pleasing religion would be an abandonment of everything personal and free in my relationship with God? I refuse to do that, to repudiate God's grace. If a living relationship with God could come by rule-keeping, then Christ died unnecessarily.*

In Galatians **2:11-21**, the Apostle Paul continues the defense of his apostolic ministry and message by informing his readers, not only of his independence of the Jerusalem Apostles, but also of his exercise of authority, on a particular occasion, over Peter, whom most believers in the early church considered to be the preeminent Apostle.

What was it that motivated Paul to report his conflict with Peter to the believers in Galatia? In the previous section, Paul described how the leaders of the Jerusalem church, including Peter, had agreed with him and Barnabas regarding the test case of Titus. None of them required Titus, a Gentile convert to Christianity, to be circumcised, even though the Judaizers pressured them to do so. The leaders understood that the Law contributed nothing to either a person's salvation, or sanctification. Peter and Paul saw eye to eye on that issue. But when Peter arrived in Antioch sometime later, his actions openly contradicted his doctrine!

When Peter came to Antioch, he saw Jews and Gentiles eating together and joined their fellowship. When certain Jews from the Jerusalem church came as representatives of James, and saw Peter eating with the Gentiles, they contended that he was going against Levitical legislation. They brought pressure to bear upon Peter, and he discontinued his practice of eating with the Gentiles. This caused the Jews in the church at Antioch to cease eating with the Gentiles, and brought about a division in the church. Paul, in resisting Peter, thus showed that he not only refused to take orders from the Jerusalem apostles, but on the other hand felt that his apostolic position gave him the right to stand openly against them in matters of wrong conduct. In no way could he have better demonstrated his independence as an apostle.

When Peter was challenged to live up to the truth of the Gospel his response was fear and failure. When Paul saw the truth of the Gospel being diluted his response was courage and confrontation. But the question we want to answer this evening is, "What is our response to the truth of the Gospel?" Before we consider chapter **3**, which begins the

**doctrinal** portion of the letter, we need to grapple with the following questions:

### **Have we been saved by the grace of God?**

The only Gospel that saves is the Gospel of the grace of God as revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ. Any other message of salvation is not the Gospel. In **Galatians 1:6-9** Paul writes,

*6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are following a different gospel—*

*7 not that there really is another gospel, but there are some who are disturbing you and wanting to distort the gospel of Christ.*

*8 But even if we (or an angel from heaven) should preach a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be condemned to hell!*

*9 As we have said before, and now I say again, if any one is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, let him be condemned to hell!*

**(New English Translation)**

Brothers and sisters, were we saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone? Are we trusting in ourselves for our sanctification-our morality, our good works, our strict observance of extra-biblical standards? If so, then we are not Christians, for an authentic Christian is one who has trusted in Christ alone for his or her justification, and is trusting in Christ alone for his or her sanctification.

### **Are we trying to mix Law and grace?**

Law means I must do something to please God, while grace means that God has finished the work for us and all we need to do is believe in Christ for our salvation. In **John 6:28-29**, we read the following:

28 So then they said to him, “What must we do to accomplish the deeds God requires?”

29 Jesus replied, “This is the deed God requires—to believe in the one whom he sent.”

**(New English Translation)**

In verse **28** the people asked, “What must we do to accomplish the deeds (**plural**) God requires?” In verse **29**, Jesus informs them that there is only one deed (**singular**) that they need to do and that one deed is to “believe in the one [Jesus Christ] whom he [God the Father] sent.”

Our Lord states very clearly here that belief in Him is the work of God—the only work of God that a human being can accomplish!

The only work that a human being can do that is acceptable to God is to believe in Christ. The deeds (**plural**) or works of God are impossible for a fallen, unregenerate human being to attain. Only Christ, in His perfect humanity, and by His perfect obedience was able to accomplish the deeds (**plural**) or works of God. When a sinner places his or her faith in Christ for salvation, the righteousness of Christ is imputed or reckoned to him or her.

Salvation is not by faith in Christ plus something. It is by faith in Christ only. While church membership and religious activities are good in their place as expressions of faith in Christ, they can never be added to faith in Christ in order to secure eternal life. Paul emphasizes this point in **Romans 11:6**: “And if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace” (**New English Translation**).

**Are we rejoicing in the fact that we are justified by faith in Christ?**

It has often been said that the word “justified” means, “just as if I’d never sinned.” This is not a bad summary of the meaning of justification. When a sinner places his or her faith in Christ for salvation, he or she is justified or declared righteous by God. He or she has a standing before

God that is impeccable. God views the believing sinner as He views Jesus Christ-perfect! His or her standing before God is as if he or she had never sinned. It is extremely assuring to a believer to know that his or her position as a saved individual is eternally secure. In **Romans 5:1-2**, Paul writes,

*1 Therefore, since we have been declared righteous by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

*2 through whom we have also obtained access into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in the hope of God's glory.*

**(New English Translation)**

In **2 Corinthians 5:21**, he writes, “*God made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we would become the righteousness of God*” **(New English Translation)**.

It is very important for us to understand that while Christ was made sin for us. He was **not** made a **sinner**. If He had been made a sinner, He could not have been an acceptable sacrifice for sin. He was made an offering for sin, or a sin offering, and therefore He was **treated** as a sinner. The sins of all those whom He represented, all those for whom He became a substitute, were placed to His account. Their entire debt of sin became His. Our sin was imputed to Him and was punished in His person. All that was necessary for God's justice to be satisfied was inflicted upon Him; all that was necessary to present to the universe an example of God's hatred of sin was suffered by Him. The whole curse of the Law, including abandonment by God, every penalty that sin deserved, the full measure of the wrath of God for sin, was poured into one cup, and given to Him to drink. When He looked into the cup He was terrified. In agony He cried out, “*Abba, Father, all things are possible for you. Take this cup away from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will*” (**Mark 14:36**). With trembling hands, He raised the cup to His lips and drank all of its bitter contents, crying out with a loud voice, “*Eloi, Eloi, lema sabachthani? which means, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*” (**Mark 15:34**)

It is very likely that as he wrote **2 Corinthians 5:21**, Paul was reflecting on what Isaiah had written seven hundred years earlier:

*4 But he lifted up our illnesses, he carried our pain; even though we thought he was being punished, attacked by God, and afflicted for something he had done.*

*5 He was wounded because of our rebellious deeds, crushed because of our sins; he endured punishment that made us well; because of his wounds we have been healed.*

*6 All of us had wandered off like sheep; each of us had strayed off on his own path, but the LORD caused the sin of all of us to attack him.*

*7 He was treated harshly and afflicted, but he did not even open his mouth. Like a lamb led to the slaughtering block, like a sheep silent before her shearers, he did not even open his mouth.*

*8 He was led away after an unjust trial—but who even cared? Indeed, he was cut off from the land of the living; because of the rebellion of his own people he was wounded.*

*9 They intended to bury him with criminals, but he ended up in a rich man's tomb, because he had committed no violent deeds, nor had he spoken deceitfully.*

*10 Though the LORD desired to crush him and make him ill, once restitution is made, he will see descendants and enjoy long life, and the LORD's purpose will be accomplished through him.*

*11 Having suffered, he will reflect on his work, he will be satisfied when he understands what he has done. "My servant will acquit many, for he carried their sins.*

*12 So I will assign him a portion with the multitudes, he will divide the spoils of victory with the powerful, because he willingly submitted to*

*death and was numbered with the rebels, when he lifted up the sin of many and intervened on behalf of the rebels.”*

**(Isaiah 53:4-12 New English Translation)**

What an amazing reversal of our condition brothers and sisters! We who were once dead in trespasses and sins have become the righteousness of God in Christ! God has not only declared that we are righteous in Christ, but He deals with us as though we had never sinned at all! We never need to fear condemnation because our sins have already been judged in Christ on the Cross. Paul assures us of this in **Romans 8:1-4**:

*1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

*2 For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

*3 For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,*

*4 so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.*

**(New English Translation)**

**Are we walking in the liberty of grace?**

Liberty does not mean license to do whatever we want to do; rather, it means the freedom in Christ to enjoy Him and to become what He has determined for us to become. As **Warren Wiersbe** explains, it is not only “freedom to do” but also “freedom **not** to do.” We are no longer in bondage to sin and the Law. As Paul will explain in the **practical** section of this letter (**Galatians 5-6**), we obey God because of **love** and not because of **Law**. Believers enjoy a wonderful liberty in Christ Are we enjoying it?

**Are we willing to defend the truth of the Gospel?**



This does not mean that we are to become Christian detectives investigating every church in our vicinity. But it does mean that we do not compromise the precious truths of the Gospel for anything or anyone! It means that we are never to be ashamed of Jesus Christ nor of His words which have brought us eternal life. As Paul writes in Galatians 1:10, “*Am I now trying to gain the approval of people, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a slave of Christ!*” (**New English Translation**)

Many actually believe that people are saved by faith in Christ in addition to any number of other religious “additives and preservatives.” It is therefore very important for us to “*contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*” (**Jude 3 New English Translation**).

The best way to defend the truth is to live the truth. Our verbal defense of the Gospel will accomplish very little if our lives contradict what we say.

Brothers and sisters, those of us who are seeking either to be justified or sanctified by a strict observance of the Law or any other system of rule-keeping, are committing two evils.

Firstly, we are frustrating the grace of God. Someone has said that the sweetest note in all of Scripture is, “*By grace are ye saved.*” But, “*if it is by grace, it is no longer by works, otherwise grace would no longer be grace.*” And Paul will inform the Galatian believers in chapter **5** and verse **4**, “*You who are trying to be declared righteous by the law have been alienated from Christ; you have fallen away from grace!*” (**New English Translation**)

Secondly, we are claiming that Christ died in vain. The agonies of the Cross of Calvary were needless if salvation is by works. In fact, if it was possible for human beings to be saved by the Law or any other system of

rule-keeping, apart from the Cross of Christ, then the very birth of Christ, His life, His death, and His resurrection were all in vain!

The one who seeks salvation through the works of the Law or any other system of rule-keeping, implies that God the Father operated as a cruel tyrant. He or she presents God as giving Christ over to die, making His soul an offering for sin, and laying upon Him the iniquity of us all, when human beings need no atoning sacrifice. They can be saved by their performance of good deeds!

We will conclude with the words of one commentator:

"Away with the blasphemy of salvation by works! Let legalists and moralists consider carefully the results of their moral boastings. What is the need of a door, if one is going to climb up some other way? The 'be good and be saved' frustrate the grace of God. They make Christ to die in vain. After all of this they are irrevocably lost, because there is no other way than grace and no other door than the Cross of Christ."