

Galatians 2:17-21  
Paul's Authentic Apostleship part 4  
What did Paul actually say to Peter? Part 2—2:17-21

Introduction: This appears to be the second part of what Paul said to Peter as he publicly rebuked him at Antioch of Syria. Paul continues to argue that his apostleship is on the same level as that of Peter. See how he carefully handles the doctrine of both justification and sanctification.

**Paul asks and answers a legitimate hypothetical question regarding salvation—2:17**

- 1) The question—<sup>17</sup> *But [δέ] then ... is Christ a servant [διάκονος] of sin [ἀμαρτία]?*
  - a) Possibility—if [εἰ; 1<sup>st</sup> class condition, assumed true] ... *we (Paul & Peter) ourselves are found to be sinners [ἀμαρτωλός],*
    - i) To be considered on the same level as godless Gentiles (cf. 2:15) because they are not teaching that Gentiles need to be circumcised. We all need to come this point before God. We are sinners before a holy God.
    - ii) The false brothers want him to repudiate this teaching of justification by faith alone. Peter's hypocritical actions influenced others in Antioch to temporarily agree with these false brothers.
    - iii) Christ is the One who taught us to reject the Law as a means of righteousness before God.
  - b) When? *while seeking [ζητέω] to be declared righteous [aor. pass. inf. δικαίωω] (acceptable to God) in Christ,*
    - i) Before they became Christians
- 2) The rejection—*May it never be!*

**A explanation of the reason one's actions may contradict one's message—2:18**

- 1) The conclusion—<sup>18</sup> *For [γάρ] ... I demonstrate [συνιστάω] myself to be a transgressor [παραβάτης].*
  - a) In other words, I am violating revelation from God (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:15, 28, 34-43)
- 2) The condition—if [εἰ] *I build [οἰκοδομέω] again those things that I destroyed [καταλύω],*
  - a) As Peter withdraws from the Gentiles at mealtime, he is effectively saying the old distinctions between Jew and Gentile need to be reinstated.

**A necessary and effective death, a focus on JUSTIFICATION—2:19**

- 1) What happened? <sup>19</sup> *For [γάρ] I (emphatic)... died [ἀποθνήσκω] to the law*
  - a) In other words, Paul is no longer responsible to the Law through Moses. The Law's penalty has been exacted and the Law is satisfied.
  - b) To be under the law of Christ is not a soft alternative to Moses; it is to move from a summary of God's righteousness to the full blaze of His holy glory! (Horner, 83)
  - c) We have been released from the binding authority of the law of Moses. (cf. Romans 7:4)

- 2) How did Paul die to the law? *through* [διά] *the law*
  - a) Cf. Romans 7:8-13
- 3) Why did Paul die to the law? *so that* [ἵνα] *I may live* [aor. act. subj. ζάω] **to God** (emphatic).
  - a) We can truly live only when we have recognized our deadness!
  - b) We must be released from the law by Christ's death in order to live to God (cf. Romans 7:1-6)

### **Living the Christian life, a focus on SANCTIFICATION—2:20**

- 1) Sanctification is based on an ever-present reality—<sup>20</sup> *I have been crucified* [pf. pass. ind. συσταυρόω] *with Christ*,
  - a) There is no need to be re-crucified. God gave my just punishment for guilt to Christ. To attempt to go back under the Law would be an attempt to deny my union with Christ.
  - b) When Christ was crucified, God identified every believer with His Son, and thus believers were crucified with Him. That crucifixion satisfied the penalty that God's broken Law demanded, and its effects have never changed. Thus the accusing finger of the Law cannot any longer point with condemnation against a person who is identified with Christ, for the full penalty has already been paid. (Kent)
- 2) Sanctification is based on the Spirit's indwelling—a comparison
  - a) Negatively— *and* [δέ] *it is no longer I* (what I was in Adam) *who lives*,
  - b) Positively—*but* [δέ] *Christ lives in me* (emphatic). (cf. Colossians 3:3)
    - i) It is not a reformation of our old sinful self, but the importation of God's life. The indwelling triune God enables us to live a life of righteousness.
    - ii) The Christian no longer thinks of himself as having a separate existence apart from Christ. His individuality is not obliterated, but he is no longer his own person.
- 3) Sanctification is maintained through faith—*So* [δέ] ... *I live in faith in the Son of God*,
  - a) What life? *the life I now live in the flesh* (physical body)
    - i) Whereas I was once spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1-3)
  - b) What has this Christ done for me? (cf. Ephesians 5:2, 25)
    - i) *who loved* [aor. act. ptc. ἀγαπάω] *me*
    - ii) *and delivered* [aor. act. ptc. παραδέδωμι] *Himself in place of* [ὑπέρ] *me*.

### **A warning of the dangers when we attempt to put ourselves under the Law—2:21**

- 1) A clear statement that invalidating the Law does not weaken grace—<sup>21</sup> *I do not declare* [ἀθετέω] *the grace of God* (as seen in Christ's death) *invalid*,
  - a) Though Peter did so by his hypocrisy. To agree with the false brothers is to declare the grace of God (Christ's death) invalid.
  - b) Cf. Romans 4:4; Ephesians 2:8-10
- 2) What? *Because* [γάρ] ... *then Christ died* [ἀποθνήσκω] *for nothing* [δωρεάν]!

- a) If we must go back under the Law (as Peter's hypocritical actions show), then Christ died needlessly
  - b) Question: did Jesus Christ completely satisfy the righteous commands of God on the cross? What did he mean when he said, "it is finished" (John 19:30)? If man could add to what Jesus did, Jesus should have declared, "It is partially finished."
- 3) Why? *if* [εἰ 1<sup>st</sup> class condition, assumed true for sake of argument] *righteousness* [δικαιοσύνη] *is through* [διὰ] *the law*,
- a) But it clearly is not through the Law.
  - b) The Law, while holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12), was also weak (Romans 8:3) because of our sinfulness as humans.

**Summary:** by his hypocrisy, Peter is distorting ...

- 1) The unity of the church—2:14
  - 2) Justification by grace through faith—2:15-16
  - 3) Freedom from the Law—2:16-18
  - 4) The very gospel itself—2:19-20
  - 5) The grace of God in the death of Christ—2:21
- We should ever be grateful that Paul had the spiritual insight along with sufficient courage to set the record straight and to defend the grace of God against any who would dilute the Gospel, whether by word or by conduct. (Kent)
  - How did Peter ultimately respond to this public rebuke? Read 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 3:15 where Paul is referred to as a beloved brother.

**Take-home truth:** becoming a Christian, therefore, means admitting that you cannot be saved by the good things that you do. There is no way to be made right with God except through faith in Christ.

Faith justifies (declare us to be acceptable to God), not because it brings about good works, but because it is the means of receiving God's grace. Yet it is not genuine unless it motivates good works.