

# Galatians: “Freed by Christ, to Follow the Spirit”

Galatians 2:15-21: “A Clean Break from the Law”

10/02/2016 : Phil de Martimprey

Key Truth

**Adding anything to Faith in Christ, results in death**

\_\_\_\_\_As Paul shares the story of Peter’s hypocrisy (**Gal 2:11-14**) to the Galatian believers, it seems like Paul is making a big deal out of something that isn’t that important. Why would he oppose Peter “to his face”? Peter just made a small mistake right? It wasn’t as though he actually believed that the Law could justify, he just had a moment of cowardice and made a mistake. To Paul, this is no small mistake, it was giving approval to a message that was a direct assault on Jesus. When Peter and Barnabas broke table fellowship with the gentiles, they were giving approval to these Judaizers who were teaching that if the gentiles wanted to become part of God’s family, they must come under the authority of the Law of Moses. Paul recognized this teaching was a direct attack on the authority of Christ, as it was an attempt to add the law to the gospel, so Paul puts Peter’s actions on display to reveal these three implications from his false behavior. **Christ Cannot Justify. Christ Promotes Sin. And Christ died for no Purpose.**

**(Gal 2:15-16)** Through Peter’s actions, he has given authority to these Judaizers message that the Law is the ultimate authority. Paul shows that if this were true, then Jesus cannot justify anyone. To be justified is to be declared innocent. These Judaizers were teaching that justification came through belief in Jesus as the Messiah IN ADDITION to submitting to the requirements of the Law of Moses. If this were true, then faith in Jesus was not sufficient for justification. Even though Paul, Peter and Barnabas were Jews, **(1:15)** they knew that the works of the Law could never justify anyone, and that it was only by believing in Christ.<sup>1</sup> The Law had never had been able justify! Starting with Adam, justification always came through Faith in God and His provision for our sin penalty. Before Jesus’ death, that provision was animal sacrifice, when Jesus was crucified, buried and rose again, he was the final and ultimate provisional sacrifice for our sins. Peter and Barnabas knew this! Faith in this truth, is the only thing needed for justification, to add any requirement beyond that is to believe that Christ cannot justify. Paul was not about to let Peter and Barnabas’ actions go unchallenged! He wasn’t concerned they had been deceived, but rather that through their actions others might be!

**(Gal 2:17-20)** Paul, Peter and Barnabas were experiencing the grace of God in relationship with the gentiles as they shared in table fellowship together. The barrier between Jew and Gentile had been torn down by Christ, and it was a wonderful thing. The Judaizers violently disagreed

---

<sup>1</sup> A chiasm is a literary device in which a sequence of ideas is presented and then repeated *in reverse order*. The result is a “mirror” effect as the ideas are “reflected” back in a passage. Each idea is connected to its “reflection” by a repeated word or phrase. Often the middle idea will not have a repeat, indicating its importance. Gal 2:16 is a Chiasm. We see these often in scripture.

- A. Not justified by works
- B. Justified Through Faith in Christ
- C. **So we have believed (the most important point)**
- B1. Justified Through Faith in Christ
- A1. Not Justified by works

with this. They found this behavior to be a direct violation of the Oral Law, and therefore a sinful act. They believed that gentiles must come under the authority of the Law if they were to enjoy these relationships. Paul's argument in **vs 17-18** is; if these Judaizers are correct, then Christ is actually a servant, or promoter of sin! For they are living the life Christ has called them to live with one another. For Paul to rebuild what he has torn down, would be to reinstate the separation between Jew and Gentile. Paul makes it clear that if he were to do that, he would be in direct violation of the Law and authority of Christ! Paul had made a clean break from the Law, and now recognizes Jesus as the sole and ultimate authority in his life. The righteous life he lives is by faith in Christ, not by the control of the Law. He has come to understand that out of love, Jesus died in his place to fulfill the requirements of the Law. Christ is no promoter of sin, in fact he offers life and freedom!

**(Gal 2:21)** Paul closes this section with stating the final implication of Peter's behavior. If he were to approve of this separation, it would be nullifying the grace of God and asserting that justification must be earned through right behavior. These gentiles would be required to become Jews through obedience to the Law. If this were true, then Christ died for no purpose. His death accomplished nothing, because there wasn't anything to accomplish. If we could earn our justification through works, then we certainly don't need Christ.