

This is what is was all about for Paul, not circumcision, not food laws, not obeying the stipulations of the law, but a real unity with the person of Jesus Christ, through faith.

This is the reason that Jesus died, to bring about the opportunity of righteousness being credited to all people everywhere, by faith, in the same manner it was credited to Abraham himself.

Paul knew that the law could not bring righteousness, but furthermore, if the law could bring righteousness to any one, then Jesus died for nothing. This was the gospel, this was what was at stake, when Peter, Barnabas and others compromised the gentiles by refusing to eat with them. This was the truth for which Paul opposed Peter, the issue that threatened to undermine the whole of the Christian mission to the gentiles.

Paul was not afraid to stand up to anybody, however important they seemed to be, if it diminished the power and force of the gospel.

Today the gospel is still under threat, still subject to being compromised and whittled away, and we must learn, like Paul, to discern the truth and refuse any diminishment of the gospel, or of the work of person of Jesus Christ.

*Next week we will see how Paul challenges the Galatians with regard to their own experience of living by faith, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and look further at what Paul describes as the 'curse' of the law, and see how Paul introduces the metaphor the the law being a gaoler.*



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## Reflections on Galatians

### Galatians 2:11-21

### "Justified By Faith"

*Paul is so confident in his God-given authority, and the truth of the gospel, that he will confront anyone in its defence. Paul opposes Peter and Barnabas for their hypocrisy. Paul asserts that a person is not justified by works but by faith. The law, and trying to obtain righteousness through the law, just demonstrates sin. Paul has died to the law, being crucified with Christ, and now lives by faith in Christ, the Son of God.*

Last week we saw that Paul's authority to preach the gospel came not from men, but from the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul's gospel was not derived from the teaching of the apostles, but from the direct revelation of God to him. This gave Paul the independence of mind to be able to stand for the gospel in the face of those who would seek to compromise it.

In chapter two we read that Paul actually opposed Peter himself, surely the number one in the church, because Peter was acting in a manner that contradicted and undermined the teaching of the gospel.

Peter had been with Paul in Antioch, and in a manner fitting the gospel, Peter and the other Jews were sharing table fellowship with the gentiles.

For a strict Jew in those days that would be unthinkable, and it would make them ceremonially unclean.

Paul, Peter, Barnabas and the others knew, having learned it from the gospel, that no-one is unclean in God's eyes if they have a true and living faith Christ. Indeed Peter himself had been given a direct vision from God, in which God says "What God has made clean, do not call common."

When, however, some other Jews arrived in Antioch, Jews claiming to come from James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem, Peter and Barnabas, and some of the others started pulling out of table fellowship with the gentiles. They were, as Paul says, “Fearing the circumcision party.”

We need to be clear on who circumcision party were.

They were not Jews simply opposing the gospel, nor were they suggesting that salvation came from the law, and not from faith. Their argument was, that to be in saving covenant of faith, a person needed also to be in the covenant of circumcision.

That is to say, if a person was to benefit from the promises to Abraham, they needed to copy Abraham and become circumcised, as Abraham was.

Furthermore, the circumcision party would have held that those who were uncircumcised were unclean, and that to eat with them, to share meals with them, would make a person unclean too.

When people came from Jerusalem, apparently from James, although probably not with his authority, they persuaded Peter and the other Jewish Christians, that they should not eat with the uncircumcised gentile Christians.

Paul, rightly, saw this as a contradiction of the gospel, and opposed Peter to his face, exposing his hypocrisy.

Paul was quite clear. He pointed out to Peter that he himself did not live “like a Jew,” obeying all the tenets of first century Judaism, so how did it make sense to expect the gentiles to adopt the practices that Peter had set aside.

Peter, let’s be clear, believed that salvation was by faith in Christ alone, and not by observing the law. Paul himself, credits Peter with this, saying that although he and Peter were both born Jews, they both

know “that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” Paul reminds Peter, that “by works of the law no one will be justified.”

Then, in case Christ himself should be accused of promoting sin, by encouraging Jews to become unclean by associating with gentiles, thereby becoming, in Jewish eyes, sinners like them, Paul argues that even if he were to try and obey the law, then all that the law could do is demonstrate that he was a sinner.

In Paul’s thought the law is not a bad thing. It was given by God, to the Jews, and it was their very great privilege. The law, however, did not bring with it the ability to keep the law, and since everyone ends up breaking the law, all the law can do is condemn them.

This is, of course, one of the great themes of Paul’s letter to the Romans.

Paul sees the law as bringing about, as it were, a spiritual kind of death. He says “through the law I died to the law.” That is to say, that since he, Paul, is a sinner, the law brings about his spiritual death.

This may seem pretty bleak, but Paul goes on to say that now he is dead to the law, he is free to “live to God.” Having condemned Paul to spiritual death, the law had no more to say to him. He was, to all intents and purposes, free from the law.

Without the burden of the law, Paul was now free to enjoy a new relationship with God, in a covenant not mediated by the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

So closely does Paul link his experiences with the person of Christ that he even says that he was, in effect, crucified with him, and that as Christ was raised to a new life, so Paul shares that new life with Christ. Hence he says, “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.”