

Galatians 2:15-21 "A Living Sacrifice of Praise"

GAL 2:15-21 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified. "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

As we come to our text this morning we note that this is in the context of Paul rebuking Peter in the previous verse.

GAL 2:14 "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

What follows in our text may be a recap of what Paul then went on to convey to Peter, or it may be where Paul breaks off to address specific Jews in Galatia. Commentators seem to be divided on the issue.

In the final analysis it really doesn't make any difference because what is being written to these Galatians regarding the law and justification is what Peter already knew and may have been reminded of by Paul in that day in which he rebuked Peter publicly.

But Peter is being used here as a way of showing these Galatian Judaizers that to accept Jesus Christ as Messiah necessarily negates the law as a means of being justified before the Lord. You can't have it both ways. You either subscribe to the law as a way to get to heaven or you embrace the one who came to fulfill the law perfectly, which no mere human could ever do.

And so, as Paul continues with this next section he reminds his readers that most of them have made the decision not to trust the

law for salvation which means they can no longer entertain the idea of adding the law.

GAL 2:15-16 "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

Paul uses a very interesting phrase here as he compares the believing Jews in Galatia with the Gentile population: "'We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners'..."

Now at first glance it might appear that Paul is being callous and insensitive to his Gentile readers, who probably would have been a majority in Galatia. But remember, that Paul is addressing a problem in Galatia which involves Jews who are trying to adversely influence these Gentiles.

And so, this is really not a favorable way of approaching these Jews despite how Paul may use this comparison. Being a Jew by birth would have guaranteed that every Jew would have been brought up on the law of Moses. But more than that it would have guaranteed them a status which they viewed as being elite.

This term Gentile "sinner" could also be substituted for the attitude which looked down on Gentiles as dogs; mere beasts when it came to morality. So, is Paul calling these Gentile believers brute beasts?

Absolutely not. He's actually using this language to put these Judaizers, as well as true believing Jews, in their place. He's reminding them of their elitist attitude toward Gentiles, who they now must call brethren in Christ.

Again, the prevailing attitude among the Judaizers is that despite how these Gentiles have embraced Christ by faith, they must now also embrace what every good Jew practiced all of their lives, which is the law.

Paul has turned this phrase around on the Judaizers and has made them look like the bigots they are when in fact, they too, have claimed to receive the same Messiah Jesus, who is no respecter of persons. This is what he means by verse 16.

GAL 2:16 "[we] know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in

Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.”

Keep in mind that Paul is specifically addressing Jews here; Jews who have claimed to put their trust in the only one who could observe the law perfectly and then died taking the penalty of our sin, despite the fact that He was sinless.

Again, Paul’s logic here is, how can you have it both ways? How can you say that you are not saved by the law and then expect the Gentiles to follow the law as a way to that salvation? Why would you force this notion on them when you claim to be justified through Jesus Christ?

Of course the answer is that these Jews were already very familiar with the law; it was a common part of their lives, and they felt it was important enough to have these Gentiles become like them.

After all, these Gentiles were part of the sinners of the world, the dogs of the world who were not worthy to be a part of the common wealth of Israel since they were vile sinners, and not keepers of God’s holy law.

If they were going to embrace a Jewish Messiah, then they also needed to embrace the law this Messiah took very seriously, to the degree that He fulfilled every jot and tittle.

The problem is that the law was never meant to justify anyone, including the Jews. The writer of Hebrews makes this abundantly clear as he writes to the Jews of his day.

HEB 10:1-4 “The law is only a shadow of the good things that are coming - not the realities themselves. For this reason it can never, by the same sacrifices repeated endlessly year after year, make perfect those who draw near to worship. If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins. But those sacrifices are an annual reminder of sins, because it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”

Now if it’s impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins, (and this of course is a reference to the most holy of days, the day of atonement), then how in the world could something like circumcision justify someone before God?

The writer of Hebrews, by the way, is not just talking about Jews of his day when he addresses this day of atonement. He's talking about Jews who were introduced to the law by Moses. He's teaching here that even when the law was first introduced to Israel, which included this day of atonement, it was not designed to eliminate sin through animal sacrifices.

This is what he means in Heb.10:2 when he says, "If it could, would they not have stopped being offered? For the worshipers would have been cleansed once for all, and would no longer have felt guilty for their sins."

You mean to say, that when Jews celebrated the day of atonement they were not actually cleansed by those animal sacrifices? That's right. That doesn't mean they weren't cleansed, it just means the blood of animals didn't cleanse them. If it had it would only have taken one sacrifice.

Well, if they were cleansed how were they then cleansed? The same way you and I are. In fact, the same way Abraham was cleansed some 400 years before the law was given to Moses; by faith in the Messiah.

Abraham understood there was no way he could earn heaven by his good works. He knew God was a holy God who demanded perfect righteousness, which Abraham didn't possess in and of himself. And so, when God promised to give Abraham a perfect righteous through His Messiah, Abraham simply believed the Lord. Paul talks about this to the Romans.

ROM 4:1-3 "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter [regarding the issue of good works]? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about - but not before God. What does the Scripture say?

"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

In other words, God's perfect righteousness was put to Abraham's account. This may be a crude analogy, but imagine that in heaven Abraham has a bank account. Except in this case it doesn't contain money but a ticket to get to heaven. Well, who put that ticket there?

We know that Abraham couldn't earn that ticket since his good works, in relation to earning that ticket, amounts to zero. So, outside of someone earning that ticket for him his bank account

always has a balance of zero. But if someone had the ability to earn that ticket for him, and then to put that ticket in his account, he would be guaranteed that one day he could cash it in for the prize; in Abraham's case eternal life with his creator.

Abraham simply believed that God put that righteousness to his account. After all, righteousness is the issue here. It is only a perfect righteousness which can justify us before God.

This is why Paul is emphatic when he says in our text, "a man is not justified by observing the law..."

Now the word justified in the Greek essentially means to declare, or pronounce one to be just or right with God.

Well, who does the declaring or pronouncing? God does. And if God declares you to be right with Himself through faith in His Son's atonement, then you can take it to the bank that you are right and nothing can change that status.

This whole idea of being justified really comes down to a legal matter, as I've stated in the past. In a court of law, for example, there is a term which can be very comforting to someone who has been acquitted of a crime, and that is the term double jeopardy.

What that means is that once you have been declared not guilty by a judge or a jury who has such authority, you can't be tried again for that same crime. You may very well be guilty. But the declaration of not guilty sets you free and you are now viewed, legally, as one who is innocent. Innocence has been put to your account.

In a similar way God has made a declaration. Our most high creator and judge has given us what none of us deserve, a declaration of not guilty. And this is the most amazing part; He knows we're guilty.

So, what takes away that guilt? The very thing the blood of bulls and goats couldn't take away. It was the blood of a sacrifice which those bulls and goats pointed to. In other words, someone had to pay the debt for sin which is death.

Again, this is a legal matter since God is just and holy. God cannot stand for sinners to be in His presence. So, we must be justified in a legal sense to get rid of the sin. And since the verdict was handed down by God to Adam after he sinned, which was death, someone

other than you or I had to die in our place to make us justified before God.

And of course, this is what Paul is pointing out to these Judaizers who have entirely missed the point of what the law could and couldn't do. The one thing it cannot do is justify us before God, since we can't put any righteousness to our account by keeping the law.

So, how are we justified? Well, he goes on in verse 16 of our text.

GAL 2:16 "... a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified."

Now Paul is going to give us some insight into what the law is good for later in this letter, but for now his point is that what it is not good for is to justify us before God. And by the way, for a Jew to take the attitude that he is not a sinner like the Gentiles and to think that the law is a way to be justified is to miss the point Jesus made during His earthly ministry.

MAT 9:9-13 "... Jesus .... saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and "sinners" came and ate with him and his disciples. When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and 'sinners'?" On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."

The Pharisees didn't see themselves as sinners, or using Jesus' analogy as those who are sick, which means they were not seeking a doctor for their problem. And since Jesus is that doctor, they didn't need Him. They felt they were already righteous.

And for many people today they view themselves the same way. They don't see themselves as spiritually sick or deficient or dead. They think their goodness will ultimately win the day. And so, they're not looking for a Savior.

It really isn't until you see your need that you will seek the one who can heal you. In fact, Paul points this out to Timothy when he

makes the comment that he, Paul, is a sinner. Being a former Pharisee this is quite a statement.

1TI 1:15 "Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners - of whom I am the worst."

If Jesus came into the world to save sinners, then the best thing for mankind is to come to the realization that we are all sinners destined to suffer the penalty for our sin which is death, and then to reach out for the solution to our sin problem who is Christ Jesus who paid that debt in our place.

Let's go back to our text, starting verse 17.

GAL 2:17-19 "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."

"If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!"

What in the world does Paul mean by this? Well, again, keep in mind that he is addressing Judaizers who want to go back to the law as a means of assisting the Gentiles to be truly saved or at least more fully sanctified.

Paul is once again using logic to make a point. Here's his point. Both the Jews and the Gentiles in this Galatian church have come to realize that Jesus Christ is the Messiah who justifies us before the Father. Okay, so we come to faith in Christ to be justified and are now declared not guilty through the righteousness of Christ.

Well, what happens, if in the process of finding this justification the Gentiles realize that their own morality does not get them to heaven, and they begin to pursue a life of sin, knowing that they'll be forgiven anyhow? For a Jew this would have been repugnant. To take a gift from God and then trample on it was unacceptable.

So, from the Judaizers perspective, how do we get the Gentiles to live moral lives before God? Well, we reintroduce the law which was designed to put a check on the immorality in a person's life.

Paul comes along and says the law cannot contribute to one's salvation. So, if the Gentiles take the attitude that the law is not to

be an integral part of their lives, and then they decide, because of Christ's righteousness put to their account, they can sin all they want, does that not make Christ a promoter of sin?

And his answer of course is, absolutely not! But there is another way of looking at this and R. Alan Cole puts it this way. "If at the very moment when we say that we ourselves are justified by faith alone, we turn out to be preaching to others that faith alone is inadequate, but that they must keep the law as well, does that not mean that trusting in Christ is only leading them into sin for it is teaching them not to trust in the law?"

Either way, Christ proves Himself to promote sin if you think that the law must be incorporated into securing our salvation. Here's the bottom line. If the Judaizers are right in demanding that God expects the law to be added to our salvation, then Jesus is a liar and scam artist, because Jesus Himself would not teach that the law must be added.

What Paul is doing in this argument is proving that the Judaizers are placing the law above Christ, thus making Jesus Christ a sinner for suggesting that He is the only way to the Father, apart from the law.

Now, if this argument was given to Peter when Paul rebuked him publicly this must have struck Peter to the core.

Remember, Peter had denied Jesus three times, and now Paul brings this flood of thoughts back to Peter in a way that not only shows Peter how he denies Jesus through his actions, but now accuses His Savior of being a sinner, since Jesus did not teach that one needed to add the law to His finished work on the cross.

This is what Paul means in verse 18.

GAL 2:18 "If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker."

In other words, if I'm going around telling people that faith in Christ alone brings our justification before God, thus fulfilling or destroying the law in a salvific way, but then I attach an addendum to that teaching by saying, 'oh, by the way, if you truly want to be saved you also need to be circumcised, then what I've done is to rebuild the law that I've destroyed as a means of salvation.

And if I have rebuilt the law as my bridge to God then I've destroyed salvation by faith in Christ alone, and I prove that I am a

law breaker, because I'm teaching a false message. A message that incorporates Christ and the law. It's either the law, or Christ. It can't be both.

GAL 2:19 "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."

What does Paul mean by this? Well, imagine being convicted of capital crime worthy of death and the penalty for that crime is carried out. At your death the penalty is satisfied, and so, as John MacArthur points out in his commentary, "the law has no more claim on you. You have paid your debt to society. Therefore, even if you were to rise from the dead you would still be guiltless before the law, which would have no claim on your new life."

Paul is saying that according to the law he has paid his debt to God. According to the law a man must die to satisfy God's justice. And if Christ has died according to the law yet without sin and I am in Christ then I have truly satisfied the law's demands in Christ.

And this is the point that Paul is making as to how he can satisfy the law in Christ and then in Christ now have the life that the law stole from him prior to being in Christ.

GAL 2:20-21 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Here's the only answer to the sin problem and it has nothing to do with keeping the law, and yet it has everything to do with keeping the law. How is that possible? I've shared this before. I once taught a message at Calvary Chapel Fort Lauderdale one Sunday evening, and I asked the question to the many who were there, "how many here were saved by good works? Raise your hands."

No one raised their hands. I was the only one who had my hand raised, proudly. As they caught their breaths after gasping over such brazenness on my part I went on to explain that every believer in that room was saved by good works; they just didn't happen to be their own.

The good works by which we are saved are the good and perfect works of the law that Christ came to accomplish on our behalf. The law which demands perfection, was fulfilled in Christ. And when He died as a sinless sacrifice on my behalf I died with Him

when I accepted His sacrifice for me. And it's the same for you and the same for Paul.

And in this sense we've satisfied our debt to God and can no longer be subject to the law's demands.

This is why Paul can say that through the law I died to the law. The reason being that when Christ died to the law He opened up our freedom from the law which demanded that we keep it perfectly to attain salvation.

Since that could never happen someone else had to pay that debt for us. And just like that criminal who died according to the law, he paid the debt, and the law no longer applied to him after his death. That criminal was free from the law though he lay six feet below the ground.

Of course the difference with Christ is that after He paid the debt of the law and was laid in a tomb, three days later He rose victoriously from the grave as the Conqueror over death and sin. This is precisely what Paul meant in verse 20.

GAL 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

When Jesus paid that debt to God at Calvary, according to the law, it was just as though you and I paid that debt to God. And in that sense you and I have been crucified with Christ as we put our faith in Him alone. This is exactly what Paul wrote to the Romans.

ROM 6:6-7 "For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin because anyone who has died has been freed from sin."

In other words, if you satisfied the debt you are free from the debt. And you have satisfied the debt by receiving the payment of Jesus Christ by faith who paid that debt for us. But Paul goes on in Romans.

ROM 6:8-10 "Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. For we know that since Christ was raised from the dead, he cannot die again; death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died, he died to sin once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God."

Ultimately salvation is about life and not death. It took Christ's death to pay our debt, but it was His resurrection which secured our life in Him. The law cannot bring life. But satisfying the law does as we embrace the one who gave the law and then submitted Himself to it as He paid the price in full through His crucifixion.

GAL 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

This word is for the Judaizers. The grace of God through Christ, not the law, is what justifies us before the Father. "For if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Did Christ die for nothing? Was He simply some well intentioned, yet misguided martyr? May it never be! He is our God. He alone is our Savior. And no amount of law could be added to the once for all sufficient sacrifice He paid on our behalf.

Whether it's circumcision, or baptism or any other law or man-made rule added to Christ's sacrifice on the cross for our salvation; if it is taught that we must accept these along with Christ, it is a false gospel and a false religion and it must be exposed in love with the truth.

We must love those who are lost, be they people who belong to cults, or people who claim to be part of Christ's church and yet preach a gospel which adds good works as the means by which we are saved.

We are not saved by good works, but we are saved unto good works. And if our lives show the world that it doesn't make any difference how we live, then we don't understand what it means to be saved by grace. Let us never trample the grace we've freely been given in Christ.

ROM 6:11-14 "In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires. Do not offer the parts of your body to sin, as instruments of wickedness, but rather offer yourselves to God, as those who have been brought from death to life; and offer the parts of your body to him as instruments of righteousness. For sin shall not be your master, because you are not under law, but under grace."