

**TITLE: DECLARED INNOCENT!**

**TEXT: GAL 2:15-21** (also Rom 3:23-31)

**INTRO:** In 2:11-14, Paul rebuked Peter for distinguishing between Jew & Gentile, saying he “*walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.*” In essence, this action was a claim to still be under the old law. So in v.15-21, Paul further explains the reason for this rebuke, indicating that the real distinction is between Christianity and Judaism, not Jew & Gentile.

**I. JUSTIFICATION IS IN CHRIST (v. 15-16):**

- A. (v. 15) “*We, Jews by nature (by birth, nationality), and not sinners of the Gentiles....*” This is not meant to put Gentiles down. It shows the only religious distinction between Jew & Gentile – their relationship to the old law. The Gentiles weren’t given the Mosaic Law. **Rom 3:1-2**– The Jews’ advantage was in that the oracles of God were given to them, so they should’ve known about the kingdom, & its inclusion of Gentiles.
- B. (v. 16) “*Having known (perfect tense) that a man isn’t justified (declared righteous/innocent) by (‘out of’ - source) works of law, but by/through faith of Jesus Christ....*”
1. We are **not** justified (declared righteous; i.e., saved) by works of law. In the context this is the Mosaic Law. But it applies to *any* law (“the” is not in the original – “works of law,” not “works of the law”). We can’t just go through the motions.
  2. We **are** justified/saved by faith **of** (not “in”) Jesus Christ. Many translations have changed this to “faith *in* Jesus Christ.” This may have been done in order to teach a **faith-only** false doctrine. But the Greek (genitive case) clearly says “by faith of Jesus Christ,” or “Jesus Christ’s faith.” This then is a reference to the faith (system of faith), or Christianity itself. We are saved by being in the *system of faith* that God has chosen. We don’t look strictly to a law to justify us (it is God that justifies – **Rom 8:33-34**, even though we have violated His law).
    - a. But does this mean we ignore the law of faith (**Rom 3:27**)? Paul makes it clear that we are not justified by works of law. But what does he say about works of faith? Nothing! This is not his topic here. So this verse doesn’t say a word about whether or not works of faith are necessary, forbidden, etc. **James 2:14-26** answers this – “faith without works is dead” (v.17,20,24); “*ye see then how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only*” (v.24). But are we justified solely by keeping every aspect of the new law? No! Because we’ve all violated it at some time in our lives.
    - b. Can we be justified by law? We *can* be justified by law if we have never violated it. We can compare ourselves to the law, and show ourselves just and righteous by our total obedience to it. However, once we have violated it, the law can only condemn us; it can never save us because it can’t take away the sin...it can only expose it, thereby condemning us. The new law is the same as the old in this sense. But the difference is that Christ’s blood brought the new law, and this is what we appeal to, not to the law itself.
  3. Since we know this, what is our obvious reaction? We believed in Jesus Christ! This was in order to be justified by faith.

**II. THE SIN OF REBUILDING THE OLD LAW (v. 17-18):**

- A. (v. 17) “*But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found sinners, is Christ a minister of sin? May it never be!*” If **we** (Jews of v.15-16 who know better) following Christ, are found sinners (returning to the law, contextually), is the fault with Christ? Of course not. We have free will, and Christ is not responsible for our decisions...we are!
- B. (v. 18) “*For if I build again (confirm, promote, establish) the things which I have destroyed, I make (exhibit) myself a violator (transgressor, lawbreaker).*” This is what Peter and the other Jews were doing. They knew justification is through Christ, not the law, and had taught it (v. 6-10; **Acts 15**). But their actions show they still hold to the old law, rebuilding what they destroyed. Paul says, “if I do this, I make **myself** a transgressor, not Christ.”
1. If Peter wants to hold to the old law, he will be found a sinner, and the law can’t forgive sin (and all have sinned –**Rom 3:23**). This is not Christ’s fault. He is not the minister of sin; He doesn’t sanction this activity.
  2. The idea is the same today. Christ’s way is still correct, regardless of how His followers violate it. We are justified by the faith of Christ, but this faith is a law (**Rom 3:27**), and it is never said that we would be justified for violating Christ’s law.

**III. THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE DISTINCTION (v. 19-21):**

- A. (v. 19-20) It requires symbolic death on the part of Christ’s followers. I died to the law, in order to live to God.
1. (v. 19) “*For I through (by means of) law died to law, that to God I might live.*” He says he died **to** the law, **by means of** the law. It is so important for us to realize that the old law wasn’t just abolished. Rather it was fulfilled. The same OT prophets that called people back to this law also claimed it would be replaced (**Jer 31:31-34**). So to fulfill it is to abolish it (disannul, cancel – **Heb 7:18**). This is exactly what Jesus did. Compare **Mt 5:17** (“*I have not come to destroy, but to fulfill*”) with **Col 2:14** (“*Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us...and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross*”).
  2. (v. 20) And here is the major transformation (how I died) – “*I’ve been crucified w/Christ, but I live; yet not I but Christ lives in me.*” This completely coincides with Paul’s statement in **Rom 6:3-6** – “*...baptized into his death...buried w/him by baptism into death.*” By the law (v. 19), I died with Christ to the law – I don’t hold to any part of it (cf. to what Peter and the other Jews were doing in v. 11-14). Now “*I live in the faith of (not in) the Son of God (His system of faith, Christianity).*” “*Who having loved me, delivered himself up on my (emphatic) behalf.*” Surely Peter knew this! But Paul had to remind him.
- B. (v. 21) It required actual death on the part of Christ.
- “*I don’t frustrate (reject, nullify, refuse) the grace of God*”(by which comes salvation – **Titus 2:11**). This is compared to Peter. Here is a very obvious but profound point for those holding to the law: “*If righteousness (noun form of “justified” in v. 16-17) was by the law, then Christ died in vain.*” Christ’s death was useless, had no meaning at all, if we are to still follow the law!

**CONCLUSION:** The seriousness of Paul’s rebuke of Peter is seen in these last 3 verses. Christ died so that we could also die to that law. To hold to it is to either say Christ hasn’t come, or that His death was useless. Today, we can be guilty of the same thing if we think we can be justified in God’s sight simply by our own good works. These works are necessary (according to the NT), but it’s Christ’s blood that saves us!