

“Dead to the Law; Alive to God”
(Galatians 2:14-21)

I. Introduction.

A. Orientation.

1. This morning, we were considering Paul’s encounter with Peter.
 - a. Peter had come to Antioch.
 - (i) While he was there, he was content to eat with the Gentiles.
 - (ii) He seemed to be fully persuaded of those things Paul went to Jerusalem earlier to confirm: that our justification – our being declared righteous in the eyes of God – is by God’s free gift, received through faith in Jesus Christ, and not by the works of the Law.
 - (a) Not through the ceremonies: which really pointed to Christ.
 - (b) Not through the moral law: which pointed out his sins, threatened death, and directed him to Christ.
 - (c) Not through circumcision: which was a reminder that he needed the circumcision of the heart which only comes through the gift of God’s grace in Christ.
 - (d) But through receiving Christ – His obedience to make us righteous, His death to take away our sins – received by faith alone.
 - b. But when certain men came from James (from Jerusalem), Peter began to withdraw.
 - (i) Suddenly faith in Christ wasn’t enough.
 - (ii) The barrier between Jew and Gentile still seemed to exist.
 - (iii) Now his circumcision became more important.
 - (iv) The ceremonial law and tradition did as well.
 - (v) Peter began to fall into the Judaizing heresy.
 - (vi) The Jews who were with him were inclined to do the same thing through his example.
 - (vii) Even Barnabas, the son of encouragement, Paul’s missionary partner to reach the Gentiles, joined with them in their hypocrisy.
2. Seeing that they were in danger of doing the same thing the Judaizers would later do to the Gentile believers in Galatia, Paul rebuked him.
 - a. He withstood him to his face.
 - b. Paul was no respecter of persons.
 - c. When it came to the Gospel, he was willing to pay any price to keep it pure.
 - d. You can see how this one point alone could sway the readers of this letter to turn away those seeking to blend the Jewish faith with Christianity.
 - e. If Paul can prove his point to Peter, he can not only demonstrate the validity of his Gospel, but at the same time refute the Judaizers.

B. Preview.

1. We come now to Paul's argument.
 - a. It is a logical argument: a *reductio ad absurdum*.
 - b. He takes Peter's premise, argues it to its logical and absurd conclusion, and then returns to declare Peter's premise to be fallacious.
 - c. In essence, Paul tells Peter that if you return to the Old Covenant by trusting in your circumcision and your observance of the Law, you are declaring the work of Christ to be worthless, Christ Himself to be a minister of sin and not righteousness and you are declaring yourself to be hopelessly lost, since you can't be saved by either the law or Christ.

2. As we look at this passage, we'll take Paul's points one step at a time to their logical conclusion.

II. Sermon.

A. First, the argument.

1. Why are you, a Jew, living like the Gentiles, but telling the Gentiles to live like Jews? Paul writes, "But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how *is it that* you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" (v. 14).
 - a. Paul is saying to Peter, "If anyone is bound to live according to the law and traditions, it would be you, since you are a Jew: this is your inheritance from God, your upbringing, your tradition.
 - b. "But yet you are living like the Gentiles (not like those without Christ, but those who through Christ are free from the ceremonial, separation, dietary laws and moral law for their justification; Acts 15).
 - c. "Why then are you suddenly compelling the Gentiles (by your example) to live like Jews (after these men came down from James)?"
 - d. "In other words, why are you becoming a Judaizer, encouraging the Gentiles and the Jews (by your example) to keep the ceremonial customs of the Jews?"
 - e. Remember that Peter, because of his position, would have a profound impact on the Gentiles. His example would be teaching them that before Jews could have fellowship with Gentiles, the Gentiles must first become Jews, as it was under the Old Covenant.

2. Don't you realize, Peter, that whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, there is only one way of salvation: faith in Christ and not through the works of the Law? He continues, "*We are* Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles. Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified" (vv. 15-16).
 - a. Paul points out to Peter that they are both Jews by nature, not by proselytism.
 - (i) Sinners are what the Jews called the Gentiles.
 - (ii) Gentiles are sinners apart from Christ, as also are the Jews.

- (iii) But the fact that Paul calls Gentiles sinners here will help us understand what follows.
- b. He says to Peter, “But even though we are Jews and know the Law (which God gave to us), we are not justified by the Law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.”
 - (i) Paul says there may be a distinction between Jews and Gentiles in our lineage (Jews being the children of Abraham, and Gentiles not), but there isn’t in the way of salvation.
 - (ii) Both Jews and Gentiles are sinners. Both, if they are to be saved, must be saved through faith in Jesus Christ.
 - (iii) There are not now nor never have been two ways of salvation: one for Jews and one for Gentiles, though there are some who have taught that Jews were saved by keeping their Law.
 - (iv) The Jews were never saved through law-keeping, but through trusting in the promised Messiah who was coming, pictured through the types and shadows of the ceremonial law.
 - (v) There is one thing that has always been true throughout God’s dealings with man: “By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified” (Cf. 143:2).
 - (vi) God has always saved whomever He’s saved by grace through faith.
3. Now put on your thinking caps. Here is where he begins to argue Peter’s position to show us how absurd it is: Now if we have left the works of the Law and have come to Christ to be justified and in doing so have become sinners (as we appear to the Judaizers who believe we must also keep the Law) then Christ must make men sinners and not righteous. That can never be! “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!” (v. 17).
- a. Paul is saying that if both he and Peter in believing in the Gospel have put themselves in the position of the Gentiles (salvation by grace through faith alone, apart from works, apart from circumcision, apart from the ceremonial law) does this mean that both of them are now sinners (from the perspective he is now taking)?
 - b. And if they are now sinners, who made them this way? Did Christ? And does this mean that Christ is a minister of sin?
 - (i) Has He put us in this position, since He has failed to justify us by faith and separated us from the Law, making us sinners like the Gentiles?
 - (ii) Obviously, Peter would have to deny this. It could never be. It would be the most revolting idea that could be suggested.
 - (iii) There is nothing wrong with Christ or His Gospel. The fault lies with the Jews who say that Christ is the minister of sin, since He has fulfilled the Law and removed us from its power.
4. Paul continues: If I turn back to the Law now that I have come to Christ and say that I must keep it to be justified, then in your view, Peter, all I have done is

proven that I am a sinner, since in coming to Christ, I have left the Law behind. “For if I rebuild what I have *once* destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor” (v. 18).

- a. By rebuilding what I have once destroyed, Paul means turning back to the Law as the means to my justification, and ultimately, my salvation. (The I here is meant for Peter, since he is the one doing this.)
- b. If I do this, I prove myself to be a transgressor: that is, by becoming as the Gentiles are in Christ – without the Law – I become (from the Jewish perspective) a transgressor/sinner.
- c. Here is Peter’s dilemma, the absurd conclusion to his premise that the Gentiles are unclean, though trusting in Christ:
 - (i) It is clear that no one can be saved by the Law: it can only condemn us.
 - (ii) But Peter, by his actions, is clearly saying Christ is not enough to save us – all He can do is make us sinners like the Gentiles.
 - (iii) In other words, there is no salvation!

5. Now we return to Paul’s argument for the validity of the Gospel – of justification by grace through faith: The Law did not save me. Far from it. The Law actually killed me so that I might live in Christ. “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God” (v. 19).

- a. Paul says, “I have not become a sinner by forsaking the Law and running to Christ.
 - (i) “The Law showed me that I was in fact a sinner, condemned to death.
 - (ii) “It showed me that I couldn’t save myself – I would never be good enough.
 - (iii) “I needed to die to the Law, to my own righteousness, my own works as the reason why God would accept me.
 - (iv) “I needed to come to Christ.”
 - (v) The Bible tells us that the Law was never given to save us, but only to teach us our need of Christ (Gal. 3:24):
 - (i) The moral law shows me my sin.
 - (ii) The ceremonial law, my need of a Savior.
- b. Paul died to the Law as the basis of his justification:
 - (i) It can no longer justify him (it never could because he is a sinner).
 - (ii) It can no longer condemn him (because he has died to the law to be joined to Christ).
 - (iii) And in Christ, he may now live to God.
 - (iv) Paul says in Romans 7: “Or do you not know, brethren (for I am speaking to those who know the law), that the law has jurisdiction over a person as long as he lives? . . . Therefore, my brethren, you also were made to die to the Law through the body of Christ, so that you might be joined to another, to Him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God” (vv. 1, 4).

6. Paul says further, “When Christ died on the cross, I died with Him. I died to the Law, to myself, to this world, and I was joined to Christ. Now I am no longer alive apart from Christ, but alive in Him. Now I live only to serve the One who loved me so much and gave Himself that I might live.” “I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the *life* which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me” (v. 20).
 - a. Paul is saying that when he believed in Christ, then his old man, condemned by the Law, died with Christ on the cross. Saul, the old man, died on the road to Damascus, but he was raised Paul the apostle.
 - b. Yet, he is still alive, because as Christ was raised from the dead, so was Paul raised from the dead: a new creature in Christ, now no longer under the law.
 - c. Paul now lived according to the new nature – the Spirit of God – living in him.
 - d. He has been saved, delivered from death, made into a child of God.
 - e. And his life evidences that change: now he lives by faith in Christ, now he lives only to serve in love the One who loved him.

7. Finally, Paul argues, “Peter, if the Judaizers are right, then there is no such thing as grace – because we have to work for our justification. If we can become righteous by keeping the law, then Christ died for nothing. I can’t believe that!” “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness *comes* through the Law, then Christ died needlessly” (v. 21).
 - a. Paul refuses to accept Peter’s conclusion because it destroys the Gospel of grace.
 - b. If the Law could have provided the righteousness we needed, then Christ wouldn’t have needed to die.
 - c. But it couldn’t. Only Christ could. This is where Paul takes his stand.

- B. The conclusion is simple:
 1. There is nothing you can do to save yourself.
 2. Righteousness only comes through believing in Christ.
 3. Turn away from what you think you might be able to do to make God accept you: He won’t accept it.
 4. If you want God to receive you, you must turn to Him through faith in Christ. Amen.