

# **GALATIANS AND YOU**

Studies in the Epistle of Paul  
to the Galatians

by

C. Norman Bartlett

1948

## **Chapter Four**

### **PERSONAL EXPLANATION**

#### **Contradiction of Freedom (2:11-21)**

*Galatians 2:11-2:21*

While it may seem to the student that in 2:11-21, the portion of Galatians covered in this chapter, we have already launched out upon the great deeps of Paul's exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith, the passage really constitutes the climax of the defense of his apostleship. With a view to further refutation of the charges of the Judaizers that he did not have an equal footing with Peter and the other apostles, Paul recounts and enlarges upon his rebuke of Peter for inconsistency. Upon that occasion Paul's authority as an apostle showed to better advantage than did that of Peter. Instead of Peter's rebuking Paul - as the Judaizers no doubt would have preferred - we find Paul rebuking Peter. Nor does this occurrence fit in very well with theories of the primacy of Peter that have held sway in many quarters from that day to this. Out of fairness to Peter, however, it ought to be pointed out that his true greatness is shown in the humble spirit in which he took the rebuke and profited by it. True humility submits to correction.

#### **Error of Peter (verses 11-14)**

To get the full force of Paul's argument in verses 15 to 21, we need to grasp the situation occasioning the reproof he felt called upon to administer to his highly esteemed colleague and fellow apostle. We shall try to sketch this background as clearly and briefly as possible. Peter stood condemned by the Christians of Antioch for inconsistency of conduct that was not without a mixture of cowardice and hypocrisy. For some time Peter and the other Jewish Christians had been eating with their Gentile brethren. In so doing they were acting contrary to the Mosaic law. But GOD had made clear to Peter in the vision recorded in Acts 10:9-16 that the ceremonial barriers between Jew and Gentile were abolished by the Gospel and the ushering in of the dispensation of grace. (Be sure you know the facts of Acts 10:1-11:18, together with the significance of same as presented in this chapter.)

Despite this revelation of the divine will, after the arrival of certain men from Jerusalem - whether official delegates from James or chance visitors is a matter of disagreement among scholars - Peter and others with him, through fear of censure, withdrew from their Gentile

brethren and no longer ate with them. In doing so, Peter and Barnabas and the rest affected scruples they did not feel and lent support to a very grievous error, namely, that Hebrew Christians were under obligation to keep the Mosaic law even though the apostolic council had declared Gentile converts free from its bondage. Peter's conduct and example raised the question whether Gentile believers were to be admitted to social intercourse with Jews without conforming to Jewish institutions. But there was a still more serious phase to the problem. Peter's high authority would constrain believers from among the Gentiles to regard Judaizing as necessary for all, since Jewish Christians could not associate with Gentiles in communion without it. Thus Peter was forcing the issue of conformity to the law or disunity in the Church. The Church was being split wide open. It was a crisis that called for decisive action. No half-way measures would do. As Peter had erred and sinned publicly, it was needful for the cause of the Gospel that he be rebuked before the whole Church.

The word for "*withdrew*" is one employed of military strategy. Peter covered up his better knowledge as a defense against criticism. He may even have persuaded himself that this little subterfuge would work for the greater good after the agitation had quieted down a bit. But the end never justifies the means where a compromise of principle is involved. Temporizing forfeits respect for truth and right. Nothing must be allowed to jeopardize the doctrine of grace. Any weakening of the basic tenet that men are saved in no other way than through faith in CHRIST, is to imperil souls, like the melting of ice on a lake that traps the unwary to a watery grave. It is all too easy for religious leaders in the interest of ecclesiastical policy or preferment to sacrifice some of the great fundamentals of the faith. Substitution of some form of works-righteousness for the Gospel of grace is all too common in these days.

**"But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel"** In other words, they did not steer a straight line in relation to the Gospel; they wavered and wobbled. We are prone to try to bend the Bible into agreement with human opinion. We lack a mastery of the Word that reveals seemingly insignificant deviations from its teachings. Unwittingly we multiply points of harmony between worldly wisdom and Gospel truth where none exist. We need keener discernment of basic differences between the Gospel and other spheres of thought and practice.

**"If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles . . . why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?"** Paul's point was well taken. And it is pertinent today. Ecclesiastical leaders are too inclined to try to force Christians of alien cultures into the mold of western Christianity, failing to distinguish between the fundamentals of the Gospel and its accidentals.

### **Freedom Through JESUS (verses 15-21)**

It is a bit uncertain as to whether verses 15 to 21 are a continuation of Paul's rebuke of Peter in the hearing of the church at Antioch or whether they constitute an enlargement for the benefit of the Galatians of what he said to Peter. The former is the more likely, for verse 14 would not be enough to convince the Galatians that he had really come to grips with Peter on the matter at issue.

**"We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles . . ."** Paul is here writing, not

from the viewpoint of man's standing before GOD, but of the Jews' attitude toward the Gentiles. It is often very difficult to get a hearing for the Gospel among those encased in pride of race, class or ancestry. In the sight of GOD birth is not worth. None but blood bought children are justified in God's sight.

**"Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ."** Deliverance from the guilt and penalty of sin comes through making JESUS CHRIST the object, not the pattern, of faith. Of course, after we have found salvation in Him, we shall seek to make Him our example in a childlike trust and confidence in GOD, our heavenly FATHER. We are saved by a faith in CHRIST, we live through the faith of CHRIST.

**"A man is not justified by the works of the law . . . for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."** Despite these clear statements as to the utter hopelessness of men's saving themselves by their own good works, we find countless men and women vainly hoping to justify themselves before GOD on the basis of character building. If they had even the remotest conception of what an infinitely holy GOD requires in the way of moral perfection, they would realize the utter futility of such efforts. They seem blissfully unaware of the ever receding horizons of what the law demands in the way of fulfillment in spirit as well as in letter (cf. Matthew 5:17-48). **"All have sinned"** (Romans 3:23). Compared with God's standards of perfection, the gradations in moral attainments among men are like the varying elevations of hills and mountains in comparison with the inconceivably great distance of the stars from our earthly planet. For even the best of men in their natural state to measure up to what GOD calls for in the way of holiness, is tragically beyond the bounds of possibility. It is as if the star pupil in a grammar school class in arithmetic were called upon to equal the mathematical achievements of an Einstein, the penalty of failure to do so being life imprisonment or death. Yet this analogy is but a feeble suggestion of man's desperate plight apart from God's redeeming grace in CHRIST.

**"even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ"** In CHRIST, and in CHRIST alone, the sinner acquires by faith the righteousness that GOD requires. Even as one must endorse a blank check made out in his name before he can cash it for the amount of money he needs, so must the sinner appropriate by faith the justification made available for him by the death of JESUS upon the Cross of Calvary. Salvation by faith and dependence on works are mutually exclusive. As has already been brought forcibly to our minds in another connection, what redemption from sin has cost the SAVIOUR shows what persistence in sin will cost the sinner; for we may rest assured that GOD would not have allowed His Son to suffer such excruciating agonies of body and spirit had there been any other way of salvation. Galatians 2:16 ought to one of your memorized verses.

**"But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid"** No wonder Paul adds the words, **"God forbid"** (or, literally, "May it not be thought of!") to the supposed possibility and inevitable conclusion involved in it. The very suggestion that CHRIST could ever be the minister of sin is too horrible, not to say blasphemous, even to contemplate. Nevertheless, we cannot escape the conclusion that if those who have accepted CHRIST are not justified before GOD, then the claims of JESUS were false and He has been proved a deceiver. Thus by plunging trustful sinners into the whirlpool of delusion, he would become the minister of sin. These are frightful

statements; but we need occasionally to be confronted with what is involved when we make GOD a liar by questioning Scriptural teachings as to the one and only way of justification.

**"For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor."** For the purpose of softening the harshness without a sacrifice of directness as to the issue itself, Paul in verse 18 substitutes the personal pronoun "I" for references to Peter. Sin lies, Paul says in substance, not in going from law to grace - as Peter's conduct would imply - but rather in returning from grace to law and thereby putting one's self under the law with all its penalties. Such a stupid return from freedom by grace to the bondage of the law is like a man's going back to prison to serve out a life sentence after he has received a full and free pardon from the governor. Or, it is like stepping off a train five hundred miles short of one's destination to walk the rest of the way, even though it means missing an appointment that is a matter of life and death.

**"For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God."** It may be that Paul here passes from his exact words to Peter to the general purport of his argument - although we cannot be certain that such is the case. But the thought contained in the words is clear enough. To die to a thing is to cease to have any relation to it. Paul is saying that, by his acceptance of CHRIST, he has been freed from bondage to the law as a legalistic system and has entered true liberty. A man who moves across the border into another state is no longer under the law of the state in which he formerly made his residence. So the sinner who takes JESUS as his SAVIOUR passes from the condemnation of the law into the glorious liberty that is in CHRIST: **"There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death"** (Romans 8:1, 2).

It is to be noted, however, that the apostle says that he is freed from the law, not that he may live in sin, but that he may live unto GOD. This is a most important point for those who hold firmly to the doctrine of justification by faith to keep ever in mind. The purpose of grace is not to give freedom to sin but to bring freedom from sin. Freed from sin, the believer is now free to live for GOD. What, then, is the purpose of the law? Anticipating in a word what will receive fuller treatment in our exposition of chapter 3, we may say that the objective of the law is to lead to CHRIST by showing man his utter need of a SAVIOUR.

The law is an X-ray which reveals his sin to the sinner but does not remove the sin from the sinner.

It condemns for sin but cannot redeem from sin.

It shows the malady without affording a remedy.

Again, we might think of the law as a road that leads up to the one and only bridge over a frightful chasm that must be crossed - and that bridge is CHRIST. In CHRIST we die positionally to the sin for which He died.

**"I am crucified with Christ"** It is hardly necessary to say that Galatians 2:20 is one of the pre-eminently great texts of Scripture (Memorize it!). Better, perhaps, than any single verse, it

summarizes Paul's philosophy of life. And for untold numbers of believers it has been a polestar of faith, the very essence of what CHRIST means to them. We may very profitably devote to it long hours of meditation and study. In this lesson we can but touch upon the highlights of interpretation. The fact remains that we have been crucified with CHRIST. The perfect tense expresses action begun in the past and continuing in the present. Positionally, our crucifixion with CHRIST occurred the moment we accepted Him as our LORD and SAVIOUR; but the effects of our acceptance of His finished work for us on the Cross will continue through all eternity. There is, however, an experimental, as well as a positional, aspect to our being crucified with CHRIST. Justification should issue in perfect sanctification. To realize that we are made holy in position should help us to become holy in condition. Many a Christian, however, wants to take a Pullman sleeper at justification and wake up in glorification, without covering on foot the rough intermediary road of progressive sanctification. On the other hand, not a few believers fall short of the full measure of victorious living through failure to grasp the transforming truth of identification with CHRIST; they depend upon what they can do for themselves in their own strength, instead of resting upon the finished work of their SAVIOUR.

**"Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God."** In connection with these words, Luther makes the illuminating observation, "My physical life 'in the flesh' is but the mask under which lives another, namely, CHRIST, my true life." Like deep-sea divers who, while working on the ocean's floor, live by the oxygen pumped down to them from above, so our life in this world of time and sense is really sustained by that higher life which we live in CHRIST.

The validity of faith rests upon the stability of its object. Faith in thin ice may have tragic consequences. As we have already stated in another connection, CHRIST must be the object of our faith if we are to be saved. There are many voices in our day bidding us, with a great show of wisdom, to have faith in faith, not in a theological CHRIST, in order to be saved. That is to say, our salvation lies in believing wholeheartedly in something - what that something may be is immaterial. Nonsense! As well tell a man to have faith in his own digestive system and to ignore any narrow-minded distinction between food and poison - the difference between mushrooms and toadstools is purely a matter of taste!

**"who loved me, and gave himself for me."** There is need for warmly personalizing the mighty truths of the atonement. Let me not only know that CHRIST died for the world; let me feel that He loved me and gave Himself for me. It matters not how much heat there is in the central heating plant if I neglect to turn on the radiators in my own apartment. Let us open our hearts in prayer and meditation to the love of JESUS for us individually. There is the closest relationship between deepened love and strengthened faith.

**"I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain."** To attempt to earn by merit what GOD gives in mercy is to frustrate the grace of GOD, so far as our experience of it is concerned. "There is," as K.S. Wuest puts it, "no salvation for the sinner who depends in the least upon good works as a means of acceptance with GOD." How important it is then for us to emphasize this in dealing with souls whom we seek to lead to CHRIST! If men could be saved by works of the law, there was no need for CHRIST to give His life a ransom for many (Matthew 20:28).

A man wanting to cross the Atlantic would be fit for a lunatic asylum if, instead of taking passage on an ocean liner, he insisted upon trying to beat the steamship by swimming the three thousand miles or more between New York and Liverpool. And yet his insanity would be wisdom alongside the folly of the sinner who despises the finished work of JESUS CHRIST and trusts to his own good works to get him into heaven.

~ end of chapter 4 ~

<http://www.baptistbiblebelievers.com/>

\*\*\*