

Good morning, I'm Jeffrey Anderson, one of the pastors here at Northlake.

Galatians 2: 17-21—¹⁷ [But] 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! ¹⁸If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. ¹⁹For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰I 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. ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

- If ever a man could have been saved by strict obedience to law, that man was Paul. He had tried Oh so hard!
- That standard Paul had been unable to meet. In fact, he had missed the target *by far*. It had not given Paul the peace with God which he so ardently desired.
- Thus the law had been his custodian to conduct him to Christ (Galatians 3:24).
 - **The Judiazers:** “In order to be saved, is it necessary that, in addition to believing in Christ, we observe the old traditions; particularly, that we adhere to the laws concerning eating and drinking, and that we accordingly separate ourselves from the Gentiles?” That was the question.
 - **Hendriksen:** “It is as if the apostle were saying, ‘I used to be of that persuasion myself. But when, by God’s marvelous grace, I was rescued from my sinful folly.’”¹
- **Stott:** “Nobody has understood Christianity who does not understand this word. It is the word ‘justified.’”
- **Martin Luther:** “This is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. Most necessary it is, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it unto others, and beat it into their heads continually.”²
- **Illustration— The Oregonian:**³ A from man not long ago was on a rafting trip in Eastern Oregon white water rafter down the Deschutes River. As he floated down the river he came to a dam and attempted to navigate around it, but the pull of the water was so great that it pulled him into the dam where his raft flipped over and he fell right into the center of the dam. The backwash of the water created a whirlpool at the base of the dam which kept him from swimming down shore.
- He struggled with great effort to swim away from the whirlpool, but the whirlpool kept pulling him down and he couldn’t break free from it, until, ultimately, he died of Hypothermia. The minute he died his body was sucked down into the whirlpool and within 5 seconds he popped up 10 yards down stream free from the current where he would have been able to swim to shore.
- Here is the point:
 - The very current he thought would kill him would have saved him.
 - By trying to save himself he killed himself.

¹ William Hendriksen, *Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon in New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1968), 105.

² Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Grand Rapids: Fleming Revel, 1994), 101.

³ The following illustration was originally taken from an article in the Oregonian and adapted by Eric Knox. I obtained a copy of Eric’s notes, but he did not have the issue date that the article ran.

- The solution to the problem was counter-intuitive.
 - The way of apparent death was the actually way of salvation.
 - Many people find Paul’s language completely alien and his argument intricate and complex.
 - There are at least two basic things which we know for certain.
 1. God is righteous;
 2. We are not.
 - “There is not 1 in 20,000 who understands the seriousness of that.”⁴
 - And if we put these two truths together, they explain our human predicament.
 - The NT seems to see only two approaches to trying to resolve this: Law or grace. **Walter Martin** the same: Two ways:
 - **The Judaizers** would go on, ‘this means that you must keep the Ten Commandments. You must love and serve the living God, and have no other gods or god-substitutes. You must reverence His name and His day, and honour your parents. You must avoid adultery, murder and theft. You must never bear false witness against your neighbor or covet anything that is his.’ But still they have not finished. ‘In addition to the moral law, there is the ceremonial law which you must observe.
 - Paul used the term “to justify” or “justification” 3 time in verse 16 alone.
 - It is the opposite of condemn.
 - Sometimes people have been “condemned” that were not guilty.
 - Similarly, we are those who are “justified” who are not innocent.
 - ¹⁷ **[But] if, while we seek to be justified in Christ,**
 - ‘we have believed *into (eis)* Christ Jesus’. It is an act of committal, not just assenting to the fact that Jesus lived and died.
 - It is important that we see the connection from last week (vv. **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.”
- But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!**
- The reason we need to back up is that in order to make sense of verse 17 and following we need to see something Paul does in verse 15. If we miss that 17 and following simply won’t make sense.
 - The word “sinners” in verse 15 is used in a limited sense.
 - Paul does **not** mean that Jews aren’t sinners, but Gentiles are.
 - He means that he and Peter, as kosher Jews, were not guilty of the flagrant and constant neglect of the Jewish dietary laws.
 - Gentiles, on the other hand, were all automatically in the category of “sinners” in the sense that they neither knew nor kept the rigorous legal requirements of Jewish life.
 - The point is this: even though we (Peter) are natural, law-keeping Jews and not Gentile “sinners,” still we both have come to stake our lives on Jesus Christ. We have trusted him. We have shown not just with our heads but with our hands and lives that if you try to work your way to heaven, you will fail. “By works of the law no flesh shall be justified!” We have

⁴ R.C. Sproul said this on a radio broadcast on one occasion. Unfortunately, I didn’t write down the title or date of the broadcast, and so I only know it for memory.

ceased to hope in ourselves at all. We find no basis of justification in us. God has done it all in Christ on the cross. And in that we believe. In Christ we trust, not in ourselves and our works. The implication, then, of verse 15 is: Peter, since we share this glorious theology and have even endorsed it with our own faith, you dare not force the Gentiles to live like Jews. ***You dare not imply that keeping the dietary laws is a work by which they can show themselves more worthy before God.***

- Now in verse 17 we can hear the echo of an argument that the *Judaizers* or the men from James (2:12) probably used against Paul. They probably said: ***By encouraging Jews to neglect the laws of God*** (e.g., the ones Peter neglected when he ate with Gentiles) ***and thus to act like Gentile sinners, you are making Christ the agent of sin.*** Paul answers in verse 17, “But if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ we ourselves were found to be sinners, is Christ then an agent of sin? Certainly not!”
- It is utterly crucial that you see what Paul is admitting and what he is denying.
 1. He is ***admitting***, first, that he and Peter and other Jewish Christians are seeking justification not in works of law but only in Christ.
 2. And he is ***admitting***, second, that in doing this they become “sinners.”
 - Now here is where we must remember the limited meaning of “sinners” from verse 15.
 - Paul means that when a Jew trusts Christ for justification, he is free from the Law and may, if he chooses, neglect the dietary laws in order to eat with Gentile brothers and sisters.
 - But people who live like that are called “sinners” by the Judaizers. So Paul accepts the term in that limited sense.
 - Yes, we are found to be “sinners” in this sense. That’s what he admits.
 - But he denies emphatically that this makes Christ an agent of sin. Why? Because it is *not* sin to be a “sinner” in this sense. It is not sin to free yourself from the ceremonial Jewish laws in order to walk in love toward Gentile Christians. It is not sin to stop depending on works. Christ is not the agent of sin. He is the agent of freedom. Freedom for God, and freedom for love. That’s Paul’s answer to the Judaizers: *Yes*, Christ frees us from the works of law; *no*, he is not thereby an agent of sin.

¹⁸If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker.

- People still argue like this today: ‘If God justifies bad people, what is the point of being good?’

Paul’s first response to his critics is to deny their suggestion with hot indignation: ‘God forbid’.

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- ***Romans 7: 1-10***—¹Do you not know, brothers—for I am speaking to men who know the law—that the law has authority over a man only as long as he lives? ²For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law of marriage. ³So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress, even though she marries another man. ⁴So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God.
- *What, then, is the purpose of the Law for the Christian?*
 - Mirror—reflects God’s character to us.
 - Restrainer—**Ills.** Speed limit.
 - Revealer—What pleases God.

- **Carson:** “For Paul, the commands of God that he finds operative for the Christian cannot be equated with the Mosaic code.”⁵
 - Paul is more than happy to live under the stipulations of the law covenant and not be unnecessarily offensive to them, but he insists that the law covenant no longer binds him. It cannot, he is under a new covenant.
 - **Ills.** Driving to Renton with my brother following. I have the freedom to use the carpool lane, he does not. So for the sake of love I remain in the stop and go traffic—bound by the law. Yet because I have my family with me I am not bound by the law. I am free. This is similar to our relationship to Moses.
 - A good resource on this subject is *Five Views on the Law and Gospel*.⁶
 - There are, however, certain constraints beyond which he cannot go.
 - He is *not* infinitely flexible; he is not ‘free from God’s law.’
 - He is not free from God’s demands, God’s requirements; he is under Christ’s law
 - **Carson:** “The heart of the idea is clear enough. All of God’s demand upon him is mediated through Christ. Whatever God demands of him as a new-covenant believer, a Christian, binds him; he cannot step outside those constraints.”⁷
 - Paul characterizes his position in Christ as ‘free’, but it is freedom for a purpose
 - Paul can be extraordinarily flexible wherever the law of God, mediated through Christ, does not impinge upon him.
 - **Bruce:** “If Paul felt no longer any necessity to comply with Jewish regulations and ceremonies as matters of divine obligation, he did not go to the other extreme and regard these things as forbidden to a Christian; henceforth they ranked as morally and religiously indifferent things, to be observed or not as occasion might indicate.”⁸
- ²⁰I 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. Romans 6 1-3—**“¹What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? ²By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? ³Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?”
- Christ who lives in us. And, living in us, He gives us new desires for holiness, for God, for heaven. It is not that we cannot sin again; we can. But we do not want to.
- ²¹I do not set aside the grace of God,**
- That is, to declare invalid, nullify—the grace of God, which I surely would be doing if I were attempting by means of law-works.

⁵ D. A. Carson, *The Cross & Christian Ministry: An Exposition of Passages From 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993), 119.

⁶ (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996). Wayne G. Strickland (Contributor), Jr., Dr. Walter C. Kaiser (Contributor), Douglas J. Moo (Contributor), Willem A. Van Gemeren (Contributor), Stanley N. Gundry (Series Editor). Several years ago the question of the relationship of the Law to the Christian became a burning issue for me. This book was immensely helpful, especially the segments by Moo.

⁷ Carson, 120.

⁸ F. F. Bruce, *1 and 2 Corinthians*, in *The New Century Bible Commentaries* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 86f.

- They think it noble to try to win their way to God and to heaven. But it is not noble. In effect it is to deny both the nature of God and the mission of Christ. It is to refuse to let God be gracious.

for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

- This is not just a generic faith; the kind of faith that is advocated in movies and the like; but faith in Christ crucified.
- The ultimate point is, though, that righteousness cannot be gained through the Law. Therefore Christ’s death was not in vain. It accomplished its purpose.
- Man’s greatest need is justification.
 - In comparison with this, all other human needs pale into insignificance.
 - **Luther:** “I must hearken to the Gospel, which teacheth me, not what I ought to do (for that is the proper office of the Law), but what Jesus Christ the Son of God hath done for me: to wit, that he suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death.”⁹
 - **Luther:** “Sin boldly but believe more boldly still. God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world...If you are a preacher of mercy, do not preach an imaginary but the true mercy. If the mercy is true, you must therefore bear the true, not an imaginary sin. God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong, but let your trust in Christ be stronger, and rejoice in Christ who is the victor over sin, death, and the world. We will commit sins while we are here...Do you think such an exalted Lamb paid merely a small price with a meager sacrifice for our sins? Pray hard for you are quite a sinner.”¹⁰

⁹ Luther, 101.

¹⁰ He wrote this to his colleague Philipp Melanchthon from his hiding place, the Wartburg Castle, in 1521. “A Letter From Luther to Melanchthon,” Letter no. 99, 1 August (Segment), trans. Erika Bullmann Flores (St. Louis: Concordia, N.D.), Vol. 15, cols. 2585-2590.