

PAUL: THE SPIRITUAL ABOLITIONIST, PART II
(Not Man's Gospel!, Part 20)

TEXT: GALATIANS 2:11-21

August 9, 2009

REVIEW/INTRODUCTION:

Since 1:13ff., Paul, through a series of carefully selected events, has been demonstrating that his gospel is not man's gospel. In 2:11-21, Paul brings his defense of the gospel to a climactic conclusion by rehearsing his public confrontation of Peter. He seizes upon Peter's failure in Antioch as an opportunity to clarify and defend the truth of the gospel.

First, we saw that:

I. PAUL CONFRONTS PETER'S CONTRADICTION OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL (2:11-13).

Paul viewed Peter's hypocrisy (i.e., play acting) as being a serious distortion and defection from the truth of the gospel. Peter didn't sin out of ignorance but rather of pretense. Peter knew that God gave him permission to eat anything (cf. Acts 10:13-16; 11:4-18).

But, Peter being afraid of the Jews was more concerned to please man (cf., Gal. 1:10) for his own self-preservation than he was to uphold the truth of the gospel and preserve the Christian's freedom.

Thus, by withdrawing and separating himself from the Gentiles, his behavior suggested that those who abstain from foods prohibited in the law are justified and those who do not are condemned ("If you eat you sin. If you don't eat you are holy.").

Martin Luther notes that by his behavior Peter,

"would have established the necessity of the Law. Thus he would have forced both Gentiles and Jews to depart from the truth of the Gospel and would have contributed greatly to their deserting Christ, denying grace, returning to Judaism, and taking upon themselves all the burdens of the Law. All this would have resulted if Paul had not rebuked him and thus called the Gentiles and Jews who had been offended by Peter's example back to freedom in Christ and to the truth of the Gospel," (*Luther's Works*, vol. 26, p. 111).

Paul rightly discerned that Peter's behavior was a serious distortion of the truth of the gospel and so he confronted Peter to his face. Paul not only confronted Peter's conduct but he also:

II. PAUL CLARIFIES PETER’S CONTRADICTION OF THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL (2:14-21).

In vv. 14-21, Paul brings his whole argument to a climactic and fitting conclusion. He presents his main argument of the letter in regard to the truth of the gospel. Verses 14-21, give us the details of what he said to Peter before the entire church in Antioch. Before we examine vv. 14-21 in detail, it will be helpful to examine some important introductory issues in order to help us better understand this section of Galatians.

LESSON:

A. THE IMPORTANCE OF THIS PASSAGE

The importance of this passage cannot be overstated.

In vv. 14-21, we are confronted with one of the clearest and most important statements in this letter (as well as the NT) concerning the truth of the gospel (i.e., justification by grace through *faith alone, Sola Fide*).

What Paul has hinted at since 1:1 concerning the gospel, he now makes crystal clear in his open rebuke of Peter (Note: Paul will go on in 3:1-5:12 to define the truth of the gospel in detail). Galatians 2:14-21 is of Paramount importance (pun intended!) in regard to Paul’s understanding of the gospel. These verses offer critical insight into the significance of the doctrine of justification.

Verses 15-16 form one unbroken sentence in the Greek and have been described as “Paul’s doctrine of justification in a nutshell,” (Fung, *Galatians*, p. 112).

The importance of the truth Paul teaches here demands that we give careful attention and great care to it. In order to better appreciate the importance of the truth communicated in this passage, consider carefully the following quotes by Calvin and Luther, which highlight the central importance of justification to the Christian faith and life.

As Calvin began his discussion of this doctrine in the Institutes, he wrote,

“...we must now discuss these matters thoroughly. And we must discuss them as to bear in mind that this is the main hinge on which religion turns, so that we devote the greater attention and care to it. For unless you first of all grasp what your relationship to God is, and the nature of his judgment concerning you, you have neither a foundation on which to establish your salvation nor one on which to build piety toward God,” (*Institutes*, 3.1.11).

In his famous work, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology*, Francis Turretin noting the importance of justification writes,

“This must be handled with the greater care and accuracy as this saving doctrine is of the greatest importance in religion. It is called by Luther ‘the article of a standing and a falling church’... By other Christians, it is termed the characteristic and basis of Christianity-not without reason- the principal rampart of the Christian religion. This being adulterated or subverted, it is impossible to retain the purity of doctrine in other places. Hence Satan in every way has endeavored to corrupt this doctrine in all ages...” (vol. 2, p. 633).

In his commentary on Galatians, Martin Luther wrote, “...the doctrine of justification is nothing to be trifled with, and it is not without reason that we inculcate it (persistent instruction- J.F.) and insist on it with such diligence,” (*Luther’s Works*, vol. 26, p. 112).

Again, Luther stated, “This doctrine is the head and the cornerstone. It alone begets, nourishes, builds, preserves, and defends the church of God; and without it the church of God cannot exist for one hour...” (Ewald M. Plass, *What Luther Says: An Anthology*, vol. 2, p. 704).

For Calvin and Luther (and Paul!) without a pure doctrine of justification, the church falls and ceases to be a true church. Moreover, the sinner is lost and left hopelessly trusting in his own works as the basis of his righteousness before God.

B. THE FOCUS OF THIS PASSAGE

It is highly instructive to note Paul’s focus in this passage when he confronts Peter’s hypocrisy.

What did Paul say to Peter? How did Paul seek to correct Peter’s behavior (i.e., sanctification)?

The answer is that Paul carefully clarifies, reasons and unfolds the truth of the gospel.

Paul demonstrates in this passage that the only prescribed remedy for our failures in sanctification is to be put into remembrance of the truth of the gospel (i.e., justification!).

It is quite telling that Paul does not prescribe a list of “practical” rules and principles for Peter to follow. For example, Paul doesn’t say to Peter, “Peter, here are 4 ways to help you overcome the fear of man.” Or, “Let me give you 5 life lessons on how to live an hypocrisy free life.”

No! Instead of offering Peter moralizing legalism, Paul reminds him afresh of the truth of the gospel (Note: Paul did this with Peter, “we know...,” 2:16; with the Galatians, cf. Gal. 1:11, “I would have you know...” and with the Romans 6 “do you not know...,” 6:3, 6, 9; Note the emphasis on “know”).

Mark this: One of the worst mistakes Bible teachers and churches make is to assume that the people they teach get the gospel.

Peter knew the gospel. But at the same time, Paul understood that he needed a fresh reminder of it! Martin Luther, speaking of people in his day, wrote, "...many have the Gospel but not the truth of the gospel." That is to say, many people profess belief in the gospel but by their behavior (Christian living), like Peter, establish the Law.

All of the problems that we experience in our Christian walk (i.e., sanctification) are a result of failing to walk in step with the truth of the gospel. Graeme Goldsworthy writes, "The only remedy that the New Testament prescribes for our problems is to bring our lives to conform to the gospel," (*According to Plan*, p. 50).

The process of sanctification is a slow, painful and sometimes nearly imperceptible process of learning how to bring every aspect of our lives into conformity with the truth of the gospel (i.e., how to make the gospel paramount).

Only a self-conscious knowledge of the gospel changes our conduct. And so as we make our way through vv. 14-21, we will see that Paul focuses on giving Peter a carefully, reasoned, clarification of the truth of the gospel.

C. THE ISSUE OF THIS PASSAGE

Regrettably, great debate has emerged in regard to what issue is being addressed in this passage.

In his newest book entitled, *Justification*, NT Wright discussing the issue Paul is addressing in Galatians 2 writes, "What is at issue is the question: is it right for Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians to eat together? Do they belong at the same table, or not? That is the question, in this, Paul's first and perhaps sharpest statement of "justification by faith," to which he regards that doctrine as the answer," (p. 114; see also *What Saint Paul Really Said*, p. 121).

According to Wright, the issue in Galatians 2 is not how people come into a right relationship with God, but rather whom one is allowed to eat with. In other words, the issue is of an ecclesiological (church) not soteriological (salvation) matter.

For Wright, to be "justified" in Galatians 2 means "to be reckoned by God to be a true member of his family, and hence with the right to share table fellowship...God's declaration (i.e., justification-J.F.) of membership, and that this always referred specifically to the coming together of Jews and Gentiles in faithful membership of the Christian family," (*Justification*, p. 116).

Is the issue that Paul is addressing here in Galatians 2 really concerning whom one is allowed to eat with (i.e., that the gospel "justifies" in that it provides the basis for Jews and Gentiles to enjoy unhindered table-fellowship)? I don't think so. The immediate and larger context of Galatians simply doesn't support this conclusion (exegesis).

What then is the issue, which Paul addresses in this passage? What is at stake? What need does the doctrine of justification address? What question does justification answer? The answer to these questions is quite simple and immensely important, which is:

“I am unjust and God is just. How then can an unjust person hope to survive the judgment of a holy and just God?”

Peter’s withdrawing and separating himself from the Gentiles evilly suggested, “If you eat you sin (unjust). If you don’t eat you are holy (just).” His hypocritical behavior implied that the observance of the Law was necessary for righteousness, which only comes through Christ (2:21). Thus, his conduct gave the impression that faith in Christ alone wasn’t sufficient for righteousness, but that works of the Law were also required. Therefore, by pretense, Peter’s conduct suggested that those who abstain from eating foods prohibited in the law are justified before God based on what they do and those who eat are condemned.

The issue at stake was not merely concerning the Jews acceptance or rejection of Gentiles based upon their observance of dietary laws (i.e., man’s acceptance of man). Rather, the issue at stake was God’s acceptance of man on the basis of faith and not works of the law.

The truth of the gospel is not that Jews and Gentiles are free to share table-fellowship together. This is certainly a wonderful fruit of the gospel but it is not the underlying issue that Paul is addressing in Galatians. The truth of the gospel is that man’s righteousness before God comes by faith alone, apart from the works of the law.

Paul has already clearly stated how much is at stake in regard to a “different gospel,” (cf. Gal. 1:8-9). Such a penalty would seem quite inappropriate for failing to accept a Gentile for table-fellowship.

The issue Paul addresses in Galatians involves man’s eternal standing before God either as guilty, enslaved and cursed or justified, freed and blessed.

D. THE MESSAGE OF THIS PASSAGE

What is the message that Paul sets forth and defends in this passage? To answer this question, we must ask another question. Because the doctrine of justification is central to the gospel, when we ask, “What is the message that Paul sets forth and defends in this passage?”, we are asking, “What is the gospel?” There are two aspects involved in answer to this question.

1. THE OBJECTIVE ASPECT OF THE GOSPEL

First, there is the objective aspect of the gospel, which details for us the historical saving event of the person and work of Christ.

The objective aspect of the gospel cannot be stressed too much. Graeme Goldsworthy notes, "It cannot be stressed too much that the biblical expression of the gospel is an historical event as God acts on behalf of his people to save. The gospel is the holy history worked out in the life and death of Christ. The gospel is *not* man's response to this event, nor is it the work of God in us now as he regenerates and sanctifies the believer," (*Gospel and Kingdom*, p. 65, footnote 12).

There is also the subjective aspect of the Gospel

2. THE SUBJECTIVE ASPECT OF THE GOSPEL

The subjective aspect to the gospel asks and answers, "How are the benefits of Christ appropriated?"

Paul, in Galatians, 2:14-21, is dealing with subjective aspect of the gospel, namely faith alone (*Sola Fide*).

Faith alone is essential to the gospel (of paramount importance!), and according to Paul without it one does not have the gospel (Refer to Gal. 1:6-9).

The message that Paul is proclaiming and defending is that man comes to share in the benefits of Christ through faith alone, which is the gift of God (Rom. 4:4-5; Eph. 2:8-9).

Paul in Ephesians 2:8-9 writes, "⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast," (Eph. 2:8-9).

The Bible clearly teaches that no amount of good works will make a man acceptable to God (Isa. 64:6; Rom. 3:20; Gal. 3:10-14; Titus 3:4-7).

Again, Paul in Titus 3:4-7 writes,

"⁴ But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by His grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life."

In answer to the question, "How are the benefits of Christ appropriated?," the Judaizer's introduced an additional instrument for one's justification. In addition to faith, the Judaizer's also insisted that works be included in one's justification.

The Judaizer's different gospel (Gal. 1:6) may be summarized as:

Faith + Works = Justification

However, Paul's gospel maintained faith alone as the sole link between sinful man and Christ. Paul's gospel may be summarized as follows:

Faith = Justification + Works

In Paul's gospel teaching, works come after faith. Man's works are not the ground or prerequisite of justification but rather the fruit. Paul says the difference between these two competing "gospels" is the difference between eternal blessing and eternal cursing (Gal. 1:8-9; 3:7-14). So, there is much at stake here.

For Paul, the truth of the gospel is not that we are justified by a righteousness found in us by virtue of what we do (cf. Gal. 2:16). Rather, the truth of the gospel is that we are justified by a righteousness found apart from us, by virtue of who we trust (the righteousness that belongs to Christ alone)!

This is Paul's message and this is our hope! Through faith alone we are linked to Christ's righteousness. Paul will make this crystal clear to Peter (and to us) in vv. 14-21.

Christ's righteousness is imputed (reckoned to my account) by faith alone apart from the works of the law. If you add anything to faith, Paul says you are left helplessly in bondage in your sin without any hope in this life or in the life to come.

CONCLUSION:

As we reflect this morning on Paul's message in Galatians, the response demanded is quite simple yet of eternal significance.

Are you trusting/resting in Christ alone for your righteousness/acceptance before God? Or, are you, like the Judaizers, trusting also in what you do as that which earns or forfeits God's favor in your life?

Listen carefully to Paul as he corrects Peter and through his counsel, may you come to trust in Christ alone as your only basis of acceptance before a righteous and just God.

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