

**” I Live by Faith in the Son of God”**  
**Galatians 2:11-21(vv. 17-21)**  
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**I. Historical Background and Biblical Context:**

Apostle Paul was an original. He sought accountability and a fair hearing, but he was not necessarily seeking endorsement. To Paul was revealed not only the gospel of grace through faith, but also the mystery of how the Gentiles were fellow heirs with the Jews “in Christ.” (See **Ephesians 2:11-3:12**) I would argue that this was new theological territory even for Apostle Peter. It was hinted but not expanded on by Jesus during His public ministry. (See **John 10:16**)

Paul was entrusted with the charge of unpacking the mystery of the Body of Christ and the church age. He was given the mission of presenting to the world the new wine for the new wine skins. This was so fitting because Paul and not Peter or any of the other early church leaders were Hebrew scholars or experts in the Old Testament scrolls.

Peter actually gave a glowing endorsement of Paul and his epistles in 2 Peter 3:14-16. A careful reading of this context leads to the conclusion that Peter placed the writings of Paul on the level of inspired Scripture. He pointed out how people were distorting Paul’s writings “even as they do the other Scriptures.”

In Galatians 1-2, Paul was defending more than his apostleship, he was defending the entire mystery revealed through him about the body of Christ and Jew and Gentile being one “in Christ.” Jesus used Paul to unpack the mystery of the church age and how all believers are knit together in perfect unity through faith in Christ.

Now Paul shares his disappointment in the failure of the Galatian converts to continue in the teachings that brought to them freedom through faith in Christ and also the failure of Peter to recognize the “separatist actions” of which he was guilty.

**II. The Lesson: “I Live by Faith in the Son of God”**

**1. vv. 11-13.**

The example cited here is concerning the behavior of the Apostle Peter and its insinuation and possible dangers regarding the unity of the church.

Apparently when Peter visited Antioch he was happy to eat with the non-Jews, ignoring Jewish restrictions on ‘cleansing’ and on eating with those who ate ‘unclean’ food, as the voice from Heaven had made clear *he could* do in **Acts 10:9-16**. But when some Jewish Christians arrived from Jerusalem, who stressed the need to keep the rituals of the Law of Moses, he had stopped eating with the non-Jews for fear he would be accused of not conforming with certain Jewish ritual requirements, even though previously he had been quite satisfied that he did not need to conform with them. And by doing this he had inadvertently led astray other Jews who were there, including Barnabas. This ties in with the man who could deny his Master under stress. Peter was a brave and good man, but he had a tendency to panic when confronted or challenged.

Whatever be the case with regard to that, the incident here demonstrates that many of the more conservative attached to the Jerusalem church still refused to eat with Gentiles. The influence of Peter’s actions was so strong here that even Barnabas had temporarily sided with them. We can see why Paul was distressed. He could see the consequences that would follow. The result could only be that two independent churches would be formed, one of which would be legalistic and separatist, and the truth of the Gospel would then be put in jeopardy.

## 2. **v. 14.**

Paul saw how detrimental this event could be. At this stage the situation was seemingly that the Jewish Christians, especially in Jerusalem and Judea, tended to remain faithful to the Jewish law and its requirements, but the Gentiles living away from Judea and Jerusalem were not being required to do so. Paul did not have any issue with that as long as it did not involve Gentiles being required to adhere to those same rituals as a supposed means to *SALVATION*. It appears Paul’s reasoning regarding the Jews was that they were simply following their *usual customs* and not making them a necessity for Christianity. But what he did have a problem with was for Jewish Christians to come among Gentiles and refuse to eat with Gentile Christians unless they fulfilled all the requirements of Jewish Law. That, he saw, could only lead to division and separation.

## 3. **vv. 15-16.**

In this single statement (Vv. 15) Paul describes the belief of the Judaizers towards the Gentile Christians. It distinguishes between Jews and Gentiles so that Paul could make it clear that (Vv. 16) regardless of which you were, the way of salvation for both was the same, believing in Jesus Christ. He is saying, “while we

may find the observance of these rituals not as difficult as the Gentiles do (because they have become second nature to us, and we do not have their sinful tendencies with regard to observance to the Law of Moses), as a result of the preaching of the Gospel we know that we cannot be saved by observing these rituals any more than they can, because we have come to recognize that salvation is not by observing the works of the Law”, but only by the grace of God through faith in the risen Christ.

#### 4. vv.17-18.            *“We Can’t go Back to Our Former Ways”*

This question can be seen in two ways. First as asking - ‘Surely seeking to be ‘put in the right’ through Christ means that we must first of all admit to being sinners and declare ourselves sinners. Does this not, it is asked, make Christ the one who serves sin?’ This question was especially relevant to converted Pharisees. They had built up a way of life that they felt had on the whole made them ‘almost good’. They were ‘by nature Jews’. Yet the Gospel was now asking them to tear down that facade and admit their sinfulness. Was this not making them sinners?

To such a question Paul replies, ‘Of course not. On the contrary, it is if I build up again what I destroyed, if I again make the Law pre-eminent, that I make myself a lawbreaker and a sinner. It is the Law that shows me where I have gone wrong and accuses me of breaking the Law’. And the more I try to observe it the more I fail. Thus if we are to speak of something as ‘promoting sin’ it is the Law that does that. And to revive it is therefore to promote sin. See **Romans 7:7-8.**

Alternately, relating to the context, the question might be seen as asking, ‘If we seek to be justified in Christ and thus abandon the ritual requirements by which we have lived as you are demanding, thus becoming in the eyes of Jews ‘sinners’, does this not mean that Christ is acting as a servant of sin and promoting sin?’ The reply is the same. It is that by again bringing in the Law I multiply sin, for it is the Law that reveals sin. Outside of the Law such things are not at all sinful, but once I come under the Law sin multiplies, for I see it for what it is.

The problem for the Judaizers was that they thought Christ’s sacrifice made **present** atonement for their sins, just as animal sacrifices had before Jesus had died, and that after that their salvation depended on their maintaining their position by observing the Law in all its forms. Jesus had thereby become to them a super-sacrifice, a help along the way, and nothing more. And it left them in the same predicament as they had been in before. How could they keep the Law perfectly? Paul rejects this. He says quite plainly that to take up that attitude is actually to encourage sin (compare **Romans 7:8-11**), for they can only fail, thus leading on to

further failure, and taking them down the road to despair. He knew it because he had walked that way himself.

But how very different was the offer of the Good News made through Christ. For those who come to Christ can ignore the requirements of the Law as far as their position before God and their eternal salvation is concerned. Instead they simply trust in what He has done for them on the cross. They accept that He died for them. They accept that He has borne their sin in their place as ‘a ransom in the place of many; (**Mark 10:45**). And then they accept that because He has died in their place, they can go free. They are forgiven, and their sins are no longer counted against them, because they had been paid for by Christ.

But does this mean that people can go on sinning? He lets us know that the answer to that question is a resounding ‘No!’ based on the significance of the cross.

5. **vv.19-21.**      ***“I Live by “Faith in the Son of God”***

Paul points out that the Law crucified Christ. He died as a supposed lawbreaker. But the wonderful thing is that when He died Paul, and all those who are in Christ and believe in Him, died with Him. His crucifixion counts as our crucifixion. Thus we were made dead to the Law by the body of Christ (**Romans 7:4**). For in Him the Law has carried out its verdict and its execution, not only on Him but on all who are His. He had done no sin, but He was made sin for us (**2 Corinthians 5:21**). So once we have become members of His body what happened to Him is also counted as having happened to us. As our sins are placed on Him, His righteousness covers us (**2 Corinthians 5:21**), and we are made the righteousness of God in Him. The Law has done its worst by condemning and punishing our sin at the cross, and is now rendered powerless. Even the Law cannot punish again a dead man who has already died for his sins. For then justice has been satisfied with the ultimate penalty. They have faced their punishment in Christ and now the law cannot touch His people any more for they are ‘dead’ in Christ, justly punished for all their sin..

But he then stresses that those who are His have died to the law for a purpose. And that is so that they may live to God (see **Romans 7:6**). There is to be no suggestion that sin no longer matters. Rather there is to be a divine compulsion. We who have been crucified with Christ now recognize that it is because we are in Christ and Christ is in us, that we are acceptable to God. Yes, it is because the risen Christ now lives in and through us. So we now recognize that we have some responsibility for Christ’s reputation, because Christ lives in us. To genuinely say

that I have been crucified with Christ and so have died to the law and its condemnation, and not then to let Him live through me is not possible, says Paul. The tree is known by its fruit.

*‘So that I might live for God.’* The purpose of our justification is not to free us to do whatever we like, but so that we might live ‘for God’. So that all our hopes and aspirations may be to serve and please God. That is what salvation is all about. It is not an easy way into Heaven, but the way back to God so that we can live to and for Him. It is to allow Him to work in us to will and to act in order to fulfill His good purpose (**Philippians 2:13**).

### 6. v. 21

Paul makes it clear here that in no way does he dismiss, diminish or discredit the Grace of God afforded the believer, only that for salvation Christ Jesus is all sufficient. Paul speaks here in response to the teachings of the Judaizers. In their teaching Christ is diminished because of their insistence that all, whether Jew or Gentile must adhere to the rituals of the Law. The righteousness that they seek through the Law is what finally matters. That is their be all and end all. They do not see their salvation as being a result of the activity of God, but as arising out of their own activity. They are failing to rest on the grace of God. And yet it is available to no one in their teaching, because no one can fully keep the Law.. Indeed they no longer leave any reason for Christ to die. For if the main basis of salvation is their own righteousness attained by keeping the Law, then the old sacrifices would be sufficient. That would then be to make Christ’s sacrifice unnecessary. It is therefore clear that faith in Christ alone, and in His saving work alone, is our only hope, and is the only way by which we can magnify the grace of God. It is by saying ‘God did it all’. All I have done is let it happen to me, and that I could do nothing about. I have responded because I had to. I have heard because He has spoken (**John 10:27-28**).

### III. Conclusion.

What Paul is against here is not the Law, but the Law looked on as a means of salvation, as a means of maintaining a covenant relationship with God. Elsewhere he says ‘the Law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just and good’ (**Romans 7:12**). As a pattern, especially as revealed in Jesus Christ, it is without compare. But his point is that as a way of salvation its standards are too good. It is beyond us. If it is seen as the means of our salvation it can only destroy us.

But once we have been crucified with Christ and have died to the Law, we will begin to fulfill it from glad hearts because we will allow that greatest of all Law-keepers, the One Who alone kept it to the full, to live through us His glorious life of obedience. But we must remember that our salvation is through His grace and His power, brought home to us when we came to the cross, and is continually at work within us as we allow the crucified and risen Christ to live through us. Never must we think that it results from our keeping of the Law, because never this life can we do that satisfactorily.