

LSB Galatians 2:11 - 21

11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he began to shrink back and separate himself, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before everyone, "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? 15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ, 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. 17 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! 18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 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. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly."

Last week we set up this situation that is the perfect storm to destroy God's church. Jewish Christians who came into the church with a lot of extra baggage.

They love Moses and the law. They love working their way to heaven. They are proud of their self-generated righteousness. And beyond the law of Moses they love all the traditions of the elders that have nothing to do with scripture. A whole way of life that they have been involved in forever. Rules and ceremonies and civil laws designed to make Jews distinctly separate from the world around them.

None of it removed sin or guilt before God. The law of God didn't remove sins, it only defined how wretched we are. God's design for His moral law was that it is a mirror that shows us how hopeless we are as debtors. The law is to show you that you're bankrupt and drive you to God to plead forgiveness.

But the jews had set all that aside and lowered the bar through all of their traditions and designed a works righteousness system. Alms and sabbath's and ridiculous Sabbath observance and strictures and cleansings and defilements and on and on.

And the jews who became christians didn't successfully walk away from all of this jewishness. Legalism. It was what had defined them for generations and they brought all of that baggage with them into the Jerusalem church.

We have a similar situation in our country as we speak. If you type into google, Californians; Go Home, you'll find bumper stickers from every western state from Texas to Montana with similar messages. Go back to California please. We don't want you and your political baggage.

Californians fleeing the socialistic agendas going to Boise and then trying to change it to California. This is how we do it in California. Well, it failed there, don't bring it here.

And that's what Paul is dealing with in Antioch. The new christians in the gentile world had enjoyed great freedom from sin and fellowship with the Saviour, and then "men from James" which is really just shorthand for jewish christians from Jerusalem, showed up and brought all of their jewish baggage from there and were foisting it on the church.

And it had gotten to the level where it was changing the gospel. Some of these false brethren were following Paul everywhere he planted a church and telling the gentiles, Paul is wrong, Paul isn't a real apostle, this is how we do it in Jerusalem, you have to be circumcised first. You have to

embrace Moses and judaism wholly before Jesus can forgive your sins. Works righteousness. Legalism. Dead christianity. Works religion.

And the church is tolerant. Jesus told us to let the tares grow side by side with the wheat lest you pull up wheat while you're getting rid of tares. The church can tolerate a lot of baggage while true christians grow in Christ. Grow out of the baggage and into Christ.

But at some level it isn't wheat growing along with tares, it's cancer cells taking over healthy cells until death ensues. And Paul has recognized that this is no longer baggage, this is cancer threatening the very life of the church.

The perfect storm had arrived in Antioch and threatened to overtake everything except for one rock of a man who is immovable, even against the towering authority of the apostle Peter who had been taken in by all of the nonsense.

Peter was such a natural leader that I'm sure whatever he was doing, the other folks just got in line. But Peter is blind sided by the extent of this threat. At best, you end up with two churches. Jewish Orthodox and Gentile Orthodox churches that never come together again. That's best case.

At worst the gospel is so compromised that regeneration is impossible and all that remains is an empty works righteousness religion with dead Jesus's hanging all over the place, emaciated on a cross, un-resurrected. Like a masthead of something no one can remember.

That's where we stopped last week. Paul comes to the realization that the very gospel message of grace plus nothing through faith plus nothing in Christ plus nothing according to the scriptures plus nothing for the glory of God alone is about to be changed.

This is what the new judaistic gospel looks like. Grace through works with

faith in works plus Christ and works according to scriptures plus the church magistereum of traditions for the glory of the one who worked for it, not God can result in salvation if you work at it hard enough.

It robs God of all glory and redirects the glory back to the religiosity of the one working for his own salvation. Grace if you work for it. Faith in your own righteousness. Christ nailed up on the wall in a corner somewhere. Scriptures with less authority than traditions of men. Glory not to God but to the worker. You worked for your salvation. You get all the credit. God will accept your own self generated righteousness.

Paul is tolerant until the gospel itself is threatened and then Paul becomes a bulldog. *14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel,*

That's the tipping point for Paul. He is as tolerant as a nursing mother to weak and wobbly new christians trying to get their feet on the ground, trying to figure things out and get some growth and strength, along with all their baggage they brought along with them into christianity. Until the gospel itself is threatened, then it isn't baggage any more, it's cancer and it has to be cut out.

But . . . Peter????!! That would be like John MacArthur showing up at our church and preaching something haywire and me taking him on, face to face. Yikes. The Lord must know I'm a weakling because I haven't had to face down much that challenged anything. So far.

Let's dive into Paul's convoluted defense and see if we can sort it out. Not easy.

I said to Cephas before everyone, "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?"

This is pretty simple. Peter you're a hypocrite. You got here and enjoyed

our liberty. No Moses. No ceremonial law. No ceremonial cleansings. No dietary rules and traditions. You left that all in Jerusalem and maybe that was part of the reason you came. Sort of freewheeling and nice up here with the gentiles that never heard of all that stuff we used to think was necessary.

So you came here and adopted, when in Antioch, do as the Antioch folks do.

OK, we need to stop for a moment. Because setting Moses law aside is both complicated and dangerous. This requires some rightly dividing God's truth. Because didn't Jesus himself say;

17 "Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. 18 For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. 19 Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Here is a reminder on how we try to rightly divide what Jesus commanded here and yet like Paul, leave the dung in the dump.

The Law of Moses is made up of 3 distinct parts. Moral law. Ceremonial laws. And civil law.

Civil law was designed for Israel as an independent nation among all the nations under God. The civil law given by God, for Israel made them distinct and it was a wonderfully just system of governance.

When God cancelled the contract with Israel, after they murdered His Son, the civil law was set aside, with Israel. Never-the-less, any country that adopts God's civil laws as their own will thrive. It's just built into the cosmos that way. But it was for Israel, and when Israel was set aside, that

law is available to other peoples, but not binding.

There's a sense that it was fulfilled in Christ when Israel broke their contract and murdered Him. Great law to adopt, but we are NOT Israel. Some day the Civil Law of God will be fulfilled ultimately when Jesus sits on David's throne and rules with a rod of Iron, physically, for a thousand years, in Jerusalem.

Next is the Ceremonial laws. All of those laws with one purpose. They all looked forward to the Lamb of God. Every single ceremonial law was a type that is a picture of the coming Messiah. He came, and He fulfilled ALL of the ceremonial law. It is all complete IN HIM.

That leaves God's moral law. The ten commandments, including the call to worship God with every cell, every fiber of your being. Those laws are as binding on us as they were on Israel.

And like Israel of old, we look into that mirror and we say; I'm bankrupt. I can't pay this debt. In my flesh, there is only evil present. The default of my fallen self is to worship me. I'm a hopeless bankrupt according to God's moral law. Hopeless unless there's a Saviour. The Mighty one of Israel.

If only there was someone to die in my place, take my sins and pay that debt, and then give me a righteousness, not my own. Jesus did that for us. And then He rose up from the dead. Every jot and tittle of the law of Moses was fulfilled in Jesus to perfection, and we are hidden in Him.

Back to Peter. He comes to Antioch. He left judaism behind. He left the civil law in Jerusalem and came under Rome's laws in Antioch. He left all the ceremonial stuff, the dietary stuff was ceremonial and civil, the washings were ceremonial, completed in Jesus cleansing for us, all of that mountain of legalistic stuff, he left it in Jerusalem and he's been enjoying some bacon and eggs and a ham sandwich for lunch, and some shredded pork shoulder with barbeque sauce for dinner, with these gentiles.

NOT the moral law. Civil law set aside. Ceremonial law complete in Christ. No moral law is broken, living like the Antioch folks live, IN Christ. But then the men from the Jerusalem church show up and bring all that baggage with them, and Peter falls right back in lock step.

What did that do? It made a two tier christianity. It sends a message to the gentile christians. Your christianity is less holy than the Jerusalem version. Pork is unclean and we can't have it. Touching you guys is defiling and then I have to go do some ceremonial cleansings. So if it's OK, you guys just stay over there, and we'll keep to our more holy selves over here.

That's a disaster. My christianity falls short of your more holy christianity? How do I get as holy as you? Well, you would need to be circumcised and observe the entire law of Moses in order to have a christianity as holy as ours.

I said to Cephas before everyone, "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?"

15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ, 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.

That's a mouthful. Paul recognizes that there are in fact two groups with distinct differences. Jews who actually did observe the law of God. And ordinary sinners who never heard of Moses or his law.

Paul acknowledges the two distinct groups. There's jewish sinners and there's gentile sinners. If you study the book of Romans, Paul approaches the sin problem just that way. In chapter 2 he shuts up every non jew as a sinner. And then in chapter 3 he shuts up every jew, as a sinner.

No denying the two very distinct groups. And Paul later also recognizes the benefits of being a Jewish sinner over a Gentile sinner. At least being a Jewish sinner, you DID have the inspired revelation of the one true God. That's a huge benefit. And if you keep God's law, there is great benefit. Moral peoples thrive naturally in God's design. It's built into the universe that way.

Moral sinners who live under God's moral law; thrive. But they're still bankrupt sinners. Better but still bankrupt before a Holy God. Not only do you thrive, but you know you're a bankrupt and you know **Who** to cry out to for mercy. That was a huge benefit.

In this paragraph Paul introduces us to the bottom line. See it there? That 5 syllable word that starts with a J. Justification. God is holy. We are sinners. How can a sinful man be justified before a Holy God?

You all remember Bildad. Right?? Bildad. He asks the correct question in the oldest piece of literature in the Bible. Bildad predated Moses and perhaps even Abraham. Listen to Job 25. Bildad asks the right question;

*1 Then Bildad the Shuhite answered and said,
2 "Rule and dread belong to Him
Who makes peace in His heights.
3 Is there any number to His troops?
And upon whom does **His light** not rise?*

I love the old joke about Satan telling God creating a man wasn't such a big deal. He could create a man out of dirt. That's not so much. And God says, OK. Let's see you do it. And Satan reaches down and scoops up some dirt. And God says, Whoa whoa whoa, what're you doing. And Satan says I'm going to create a man out of this dirt. And God says; Get your own dirt.

He owns the light. He owns the dirt. He owns all of the dirt on all of the planets that the light that he owns touches. Bildad continues;

*4 How then can mortal man be right with God?
Or how can he be pure who is born of woman?
5 Behold even the moon has no brightness,
And the stars are not pure in His sight;
6 How much less mortal man, that maggot,
And the son of man, that worm!"*

We are hopelessly bankrupt before a Holy God. Maggots. Worms. That's some worm theology folks. We need to get our perspectives right. We wouldn't know the universe was there, except light from God, makes the stars shine. He owns it all. And we are maggots.

Bildad at least understood the perspective of the greatness of the God we have offended, and the maggotness of the offenders. You're going to give your maggot righteousness to the God who's light shines on the universes and He's going to accept that??

Paul says, we're jewish sinners and that's distinctly better than gentile sinners but we're both a billion miles short of being justified before a Holy God.

Listen again to Paul's argument and see if it doesn't begin to click for you;
15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Jesus Christ, 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.

Paul says, you're compelling these gentiles to become jews. Great. There is benefit to Moses law. It would get them one inch closer to God in a million mile journey.

Gentile sinners have a million mile journey to be justified before God. Jewish sinners who have God's law have a million mile journey minus one

inch that the law benefitted them. There is benefit in the law, but there is no justification by the law. Jews are just as dead to God as gentiles. But at least if they were paying attention, they have the law to tell them why!

And some jews, like David in Psalm 51 and the tax collector in Jesus illustration cried out to God to save them. And He does. God saves jews the same way He saves ordinary gentile sinners like you and me. There was no difference even during Israel's old covenant.

Those animal sacrifices didn't justify anyone, but they looked forward to the one sacrifice of the Lamb of God that would. Now we look backwards to the same sacrifice and cry out for mercy just as the jews did.

But let's follow Paul's logic to it's conclusion. Jews are jews and gentiles are sinners . . . so . . . what does that make Peter, last week, when he was busy eating ham sandwiches with the other saved sinners? Hmmm?

Let's press it further then; If these gentiles christians are sinners because they don't jump through all of the jewish hoops that you guys do . . . does that make Jesus the author of sinners?

17 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!

That conclusion is impossible to not get to using the logic that the jews who came couldn't associate with the lower echelon gentile christians without somehow being soiled and contaminated by their obvious sin. Eating bacon and everything.

Christ regenerated all these gentile christians but they're sinners, umm, what does that make Christ? The logic is impossible. Paul says; me genoito! Strongest possible NO. Impossible NO. Never! Absolutely NOT.

They aren't breaking the Moral law. They're ignoring Moses civil law for

Israel, and they have no need for ceremonial law that was utterly completed in Christ. If you're going to call them sinners then you'll have to include the person who quickened them from spiritual death to spiritual life! And of course Peter who was right there with them last week before the non-sinner sinners showed up.

The Lord revealed to Peter three times in the visions before Cornelius' men came to fetch Peter to them, *“What God has cleansed, no longer consider defiled.” “What God has cleansed, no longer consider defiled.” “What God has cleansed, no longer consider defiled.”*

God had cleansed these gentiles in His blood and they enjoyed great freedom from sin and death, until jews showed up and rejected the cleansing work of Jesus and told them that's not enough.

In effect that makes Jesus the author of defiled people. *17 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! 18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.*

If you rebuild the judaistic false religious system of righteousness by works, you don't need Christ. You've set His imputed perfect righteousness aside and you're going to achieve a righteousness of your own doing by observing the works of the law, guess what.

All you achieved is proving you're a sinner in need of a saviour. Your self generated righteousness is filthy rags to God. By rebuilding judaism you've abandoned Christ. Righteousness by works is filth to God and you are again removed from God's sight because you are nothing but a transgressor of that law that you love.

In evangelism explosion we used to ask people dual questions in order to quickly expose what they are relying on for justification with a perfect and Holy God.

If you were to die today, do you know for sure that you would go to heaven. Surprisingly, most folks, maybe half and half, would say, yes, I'm OK.

Then the second question narrows down exactly why a Righteous and Holy God should accept them.

If you did die today and you stood before God and He said to you; Why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?

And then it tumbles out. I'm good. I've lead a moral life. On a curve I'm more righteous than many. More righteous than most. I don't kill people. I don't steal. I don't cheat on the partner I happen to be with at the moment. I try not to tell lies.

They're depending on their own good works being good enough to live with a Holy God. But God's standard is, *48 Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.* Matt. 5:48 Anything less than sinless perfection is filthy rags. All our self righteousness is filthy rags to God. Sewage soaked rags is what you're clothed with. Perfect sinlessness is the standard.

18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

A righteousness from your own works is only hopeless bankrupt transgression. So if these jews have abandoned Jesus and are relying on their jewishness in the law, they are hopeless bankrupt transgressors.

They have walked backwards from freedom from sin in Christ, to being transgressors in a hopeless bankrupt system that God will reject.

Next week we'll finish this section with an astounding truth of how we are delivered from sin with a righteousness not our own, the very righteousness of Christ, imputed to our accounts.