

Series: Galatians
Title: Offenses of Legalists
Text: Galatians 2: 16-21
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Referring to when Peter and Barnabas led other Jewish believers to leave the table with the Gentiles for fear of the Jews, Paul wrote:

Galatians 2: 14: But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

Peter lived after the manner of the Gentiles. The Gentiles were never under law. Those called by the grace of God now walked by faith in Christ which works by love. That is how Peter lived rather than under the law given at Mt Sinai. But on this occasion, Peter compelled believing Gentiles to live under the law of Sinai as did the unbelieving Jewish legalists.

Is that not what the religious world in our day compels believers to do? They compel with law. They compel to live under law. They say it is necessary for salvation. It is legalism no matter what the reason given when we require a believer to live under the law given at Sinai as necessary for some aspect of salvation.

Law is not the motive of believers but the love of Christ. We are not walking under the letter of the law but under the grace of God. We are not guided by letter of the law but we are guided into all truth by the Spirit of truth. We serve God in newness of spirit, not the oldness of the letter. In other words, Christ rules our heart rather than the law ruling our flesh. We live unto Christ unto the glory of God in all that we do as we walk by faith in Christ (trusting Christ to be our Righteous fulfillment of the law) and love our brethren (by the love of Christ constraining us).

But Paul declares by this act that Peter and Barnabas “*walked not uprightly according to the truth.*” This simple act of moving from eating with Gentiles to the table of the Jews was a gospel issue. They walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel.

Proposition: The apostle Paul declares that living under law, and compelling others to live under law, is an offense to God.

Title: Offenses of Legalists

THE OFFENSE OF DENYING THE GOSPEL

Galatians 2: 15: We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles 16: Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

The first offense legalists commit by compelling believers to live under the law is that they deny the gospel of Christ. In this case, Paul reminds Peter of the very gospel they professed to believe.

He says that we Jews were actually under the law. Paul and Peter were unlike these Gentile believers because the Gentiles were never under the law of given at Mt Sinai. Now, by God's grace, Paul says that we, Jewish believers, know that it is impossible for a sinner to be justified by the law. He says "Even we, who were under the law, no longer seek to be justified by the works of the law. We are justified even as these Gentiles who never were under the law, that is, by the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is the very reason we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faithfulness of the Lord Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law."

What is justification? Justification is God declaring that a man has no record of sin past, present or future before his holy, just and good law. Christ is the believer's Righteousness eternally. God shall never have a record of sin against us. Christ put away our sin by his precious blood. To be righteous is to have given the law everything it demands past, present and future. Every true believer is as holy, just and good as the law of God. Therefore, those who are justified through faith in Christ—trusting the faith of Christ—that is, the faithfulness of Christ's person and works—owe the law of God nothing.

This is not by the works of the law. "*A man is not justified by the works of the law...for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*" Every son of Adam is guilty by Adam's transgression. No sinner can clear his record before God. The law demands death of hell to the guilty. But only Christ satisfied the demands of that second death. He did so only for his people for whom he died.

We come into the world guilty in Adam. All mankind has sinned. We have all come short of the glory of God. So the law was not given to give us life. We cannot obtain righteousness by our works to the law. The law was given to declare us guilty.

Romans 3: 19: Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. 20 Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.

Justification is by the faith of Jesus Christ. The faith of Christ is *v20...the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.* Christ loved his people and gave his life for us. That is *the faith of Christ.* It is his work which he accomplished for his people. The Lord Jesus came into the world without sin. He is the last Adam representing his people. Being without sin, he was fit to bear the sin of his people. Therefore, he made him sin for his people (2 Cor 5:21). By Christ laying down his life unto the full satisfaction of the justice of God, he justified his people by his faithfulness.

Paul said that knowing this, "*EVEN WE*"—even we Jews who had the law—"have believed *IN Jesus Christ that we might be justified by the faith OF Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*" When God gives faith to a sinner, true faith believes in Jesus Christ that we might be justified by his works, not our own. True faith rests in Christ believing that we are justified by his righteousness, not by the works of the law.

So Paul did not bring Gentile believers under the law because the Gentiles never had been under the law given at Sinai. It was unnecessary. Like the Jewish believers, Gentile believers

“believed IN Christ Jesus that they might be justified by the faith OF Christ, and not by the works of the law.”

All who trust Christ are justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses. But no one who trusts his own law-obedience for justification can ever be justified. So the first offense of legalists is that to go under law and compel others to live under law is to deny the very truth of the gospel we profess to believe.

THE OFFENSE OF CHARGING CHRIST

Galatians 2: 17: 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.

The second offense of legalists is that by making the law a necessity in the life of a believer is to call Christ the minister of sin.

There are several ways to read this. One, if while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves are found bringing the law in again by compelling with law, did Christ minister that sinful compelling behavior in us? Did Christ work that in us? God forbid.

Two, it is more likely Paul is condemning the legalists. The legalists were calling Gentile believers sinners because they did not live under law as the legalists did. Paul says that to compel sinners to live under law is to say that the doctrine Christ ministered to us is sinful doctrine. It is say Christ is the minister of sin! Paul says, *“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are [viewed as] sinners, [or called anti-nomian: anti-law; by legalists] is therefore Christ the minister of sin?”* Did Christ minister a doctrine to us that is licentious? Did Christ declare we are justified by his finished work when in reality we are sinners unless we add our works of law obedience to his works?

The legalist Jews were insisting that a man’s law obedience had to be added to faith in Christ or else the Gentile believers were living in sin. They were saying that after a man believes in Christ for justification then he must come under the law and live under the law or he is a sinner; he is anti-law; he is a transgressor! That is to charge Christ with being the minister of sinful doctrine.

The Gentiles, who never were under the law of Moses, did not even consider the law of Sinai at all. They did not live under any of the law given by God at Sinai nor did Paul direct them back to the law of Moses. In this letter he says what he says everywhere, for a believer *“neither circumcision avails nor uncircumcision.”* It does not avail to be under the law of Moses nor does it avail if one is not under the law of Moses. That which avails is faith in Christ, which works by love by Christ working in us. Therefore, since Paul and the Gentiles did not live under the law given at Sinai the legalists of that day called them sinners and broke fellowship with them. They do the same in our day. They call us sinners by calling us antinomian (anti-law).

The apostle Paul was accused of being lawless and against the law; so was Stephen; so was Christ. But Paul was not accused of being antinomian when he was among the Pharisees. They did not say he was against the law when he was a strict follower and promoter of the law. He was only accused of this when Christ made him alive spiritually so that Paul rested in the obedience of Christ and began declaring the gospel of sovereign grace in Christ. That ought to tell us something about those who would lay such charges against us.

But how many times have you heard it? They say that if we do not enforce the law it will result in lawlessness. The only way to stop sinners from lawlessness is to make them perfectly righteous so that the law has nothing else to say to them. “The law was not made for a righteous man”, only for the lawless (1 Tim 1:9). Christ is the believer’s Righteousness. While the legalists insist we must submit to the law given at Sinai or else we are sinners, believers have been made to subject ourselves to the Righteousness of God when God’s grace made us submit to Christ in faith. By Christ, we are righteous; by Christ we have established the law of God in perfect righteousness. “*Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone that believes.*” (1 Tim. 1:7-10; Rom. 10:4). There remains no work to be done by the sinner to be righteous.

So the great offense in making works of the law a necessity for some part of salvation is that it calls Christ the minister of sin! Paul says they are saying the doctrine of Christ is licentious doctrine. They are calling Christ the minister of a doctrine of sin! That is why Paul said in verse 5, “*To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; THAT THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL MIGHT CONTINUE WITH YOU.*” That is why Peter’s error was so offensive and Paul said, in verse 14:, “*I saw that they WALKED NOT UPRIGHTLY ACCORDING TO THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL.*”

When asking this rhetorical question, “Is Christ the minister of sin?” Paul gives an emphatic, “God forbid!” Christ our Prophet is in no way a minister of sin. Christ is all and every true believer is complete in him. If at your leisure you read Romans 6, Paul declares it is impossible for a believer to live in sin. We will see in a moment that Paul says the same thing at the end of this chapter. So we say with Paul, “God forbid!”

THE OFFENSE OF MAKING MYSELF A TRANSGRESSOR

Galatians 2: 18 For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19: For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. 20: I am crucified with Christ: 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, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

The third offense in compelling myself or others to live under law is that I make myself a transgressor. By turning from Christ to the law given at Sinai a believer actually breaks the whole law of God and sins against Christ.

After professing to be justified by Christ, after professing Christ is my Sanctification, if I attempt to add my works of righteousness to Christ then I make myself the transgressor. As Paul says later, “*Christ is become of no effect unto you whosoever you are that are justified by law*” you have left grace for works (Gal 5:4).

Notice, Paul calls faith in Christ the destruction of some things. It is the destruction of all hope of justification and holiness by the works of the law. It is the destruction of legalism. The middle wall of law that we once used to pretentiously make ourselves to differ from others has been taken down, fulfilled, by Christ. Now we live by Christ living in us; now we live by faith in Christ alone. Therefore, faith in Christ destroys all our former confidence in our works under law.

Therefore, the reason I would make myself a transgressor to go back to the law for any part of justification is “*For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. I am crucified with Christ.*” Believer, if you are Christ’s then you were crucified with Christ.

Please get this in your heart! It is not “as if” you were crucified with Christ. Like Levi offered tithes in Abraham because he was in Abraham’s loins so all God’s elect are crucified because we were in Christ. By Christ’s death on the cross he satisfied the very law he gave on behalf of his people. Believer, you are dead to the law. Paul says in Romans 6, “Reckon ye, yourselves, to be dead indeed unto sin.” Our body of sin has been destroyed when Christ was crucified. Our body of sin has been buried when Christ was buried. That is why it is impossible for a believer to live in sin. It is impossible for us to have a record of sin before God because Christ put it away. “He that is dead is freed from sin”—the word “freed” is “justified” from sin (Rom 6: 7). It is impossible for a righteous man to live as a condemned man in sin. Before God we are righteous in Christ. The law has no more dominion over us.

The purpose for which Christ freed his people from the law is *“that I might live unto God.”* So Paul says, *“I am crucified with Christ; 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, who loved me, and gave himself for me.”* When Christ lives in us we stop taking credit for anything, even our life. Paul says, *“I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”* When Christ lives in us we stop looking anywhere else but to Christ as our Guide, *“the life which I now live in the flesh I live by [the law? No] by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”*

Brethren, it is impossible to be under the law as a rule of life without keeping that law. And unless you keep it in perfect righteousness then you are under the curse. How then do we live in this flesh? Christ lives in every true believer. Christ is our Master and we are his willing bond servants. By Christ living in us we live unto him by the constraint of his love. His love actually motivates the believer in our heart to live unto him.

To go back to the law for any reason is to go back to our first husband, the law. Christ is our Husband. He produces the fruit of righteousness in us like as a husband produces fruit in his bride. All fruit of righteousness is by Christ, not by law, not by our sinful flesh, not by our own efforts. All fruit is only by Christ living in us. He is the Vine we are the branches. We bring forth fruit by Christ the Vine. It is called walking in the Spirit. By the Spirit of Christ our flesh is mortified so that we do not fulfill the lusts of our flesh (Gal 5:16-26). Believer’s walk by faith the same way we were first called to faith in Christ, that is, by the Spirit of Christ—“And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father” (Gal 4:6).

THE GREAT OFFENSE

Galatians 2: 21: I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

This is the sum and grand offense of all these other offenses. To go back to law is to frustrate—to reject and deny—salvation by the grace of God because if righteousness comes by our works under the law then we are saying that Christ died in vain.

Believer look to Christ for All! My confidence that every believer will do so is the same as Paul’s confidence in the true Galatian believers—“I have confidence in you THROUGH THE LORD, that ye will be none otherwise minded.” (Gal 5:10) The Lord will not allow those in whom he dwells to go back under the law and perish. He will keep us minding the things of the Spirit setting our affection on Christ our Life at God’s right hand.

Amen!

