

5. No Return to the Law



Gal 2:11-21

(11) But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

(12) For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

(13) And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

(14) But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

(15) We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

(16) yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

(17) But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

(18) For if I rebuild what I tore down, 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. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

(21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

(11) But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Peter — "Cephas" in the oldest manuscripts Paul's withstanding Peter is the strongest proof that the former gives of the independence of his apostleship in relation to the other apostles, and upsets the Romish doctrine of Peter's supremacy. The apostles were not always inspired; but were so always in *writing* the Scriptures. If then the inspired men who *wrote* them were not invariably at other times infallible, much less were the uninspired men who kept them. The Christian fathers may be trusted generally as witnesses to facts, but not implicitly followed in matters of opinion.

come to Antioch — then the citadel of the Gentile Church: where first the Gospel was preached to *idolatrous Gentiles*, and where the name "Christians" was first given ([Act 11:20](#), [Act 11:26](#)), and where Peter is said to have been subsequently bishop. The question at Antioch was not whether the Gentiles were admissible to the Christian covenant without becoming circumcised - that was the question settled at the Jerusalem council just before - but whether the Gentile Christians were to be admitted to *social intercourse with the Jewish Christians* without conforming to the Jewish institution. The Judaizers, soon after the council had passed the

resolutions recognizing the equal rights of the Gentile Christians, repaired to Antioch, the scene of the gathering in of the Gentiles ([Act 11:20-26](#)), to witness, what to Jews would look so extraordinary, the receiving of men to communion of the Church without circumcision. Regarding the proceeding with prejudice, they explained away the force of the Jerusalem decision; and probably also desired to watch whether the *Jewish* Christians among the Gentiles violated the law, which that decision did not verbally sanction *them* in doing, though giving the Gentiles latitude ([Act 15:19](#)).

to be blamed — rather, “(self)-condemned”; his act at one time condemning his contrary acting at another time.

- (12) For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

certain — men: perhaps James’ view (in which he was not infallible, any more than Peter) was that the Jewish converts were still to observe Jewish ordinances, from which he had decided with the council the *Gentiles* should be free ([Act 15:19](#)). Neander, however, may be right in thinking these self-styled delegates from James were not really from him. [Act 15:24](#) favors this. “Certain from James,” may mean merely that they came from the Church at Jerusalem under James’ bishopric. Still James’ leanings were to legalism, and this gave him his influence with the Jewish party ([Act 21:18-26](#)).

eat with ... Gentiles — as in [Act 10:10-20](#), [Act 10:48](#), according to the command of the vision ([Act 11:3-17](#)). Yet after all, this same Peter, through fear of man ([Pro 29:25](#)), was faithless to his own so distinctly avowed principles ([Act 15:7-11](#)). We recognize the same old nature in him as led him, after faithfully witnessing for Christ, yet for a brief space, to deny Him. “Ever the first to recognize, and the first to draw back from great truths” [Alford]. An undesigned coincidence between the Gospels and the Epistle in the consistency of character as portrayed in both. It is beautiful to see how earthly misunderstandings of Christians are lost in Christ. For in [2Pe 3:15](#), Peter praises the very Epistles of Paul which he knew contained his own condemnation. Though apart from one another and differing in characteristics, the two apostles were one in Christ.

withdrew — *Greek*, “*began to withdraw*,” etc. This implies a *gradual drawing back*; “separated,” *entire severance*.

- (13) And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

the other — *Greek*, “the rest.”

Jews — Jewish Christians.

dissembled likewise — *Greek*, “joined in hypocrisy,” namely, in living as though the law were necessary to justification, through fear of man, though they knew from God their Christian liberty of eating with Gentiles, and had availed themselves of it already ([Act 11:2-17](#)). The case was distinct from that in 1 Corinthians 8:1-10:33; [Rom 14:1-23](#). It was not a question of liberty, and of bearing with others’ infirmities, but one affecting the essence of the Gospel, whether the Gentiles are to be virtually “compelled to live as do the Jews,” in order to be justified ([Gal 2:14](#)).

Barnabas also — “Even Barnabas”: one least likely to be led into such an error, being with Paul in first preaching to the idolatrous Gentiles: showing the power of bad example and numbers. In Antioch, the capital of Gentile Christianity and the central point of Christian missions, the controversy first arose, and in the same spot it now broke out afresh; and here Paul had first to encounter the party that afterwards persecuted him in every scene of his labors ([Act 15:30-35](#)).

(14) But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

walked not uprightly — literally, "straight": "were not walking with straightforward steps." Compare [Gal 6:16](#).

truth of the gospel — which teaches that justification by legal works and observances is inconsistent with redemption by Christ. Paul alone here maintained the truth against Judaism, as afterwards against heathenism ([2Ti 4:16](#), [2Ti 4:17](#)).

Peter — "Cephas" in the oldest manuscripts

before ... all — ([1Ti 5:20](#)).

If thou, etc. — "If thou, although being a Jew (and therefore one who might seem to be more bound to the law than the Gentiles), livest (habitually, without scruple and from conviction, [Act 15:10](#), [Act 15:11](#)) as a Gentile (freely eating of every food, and living in other respects also as if legal ordinances in no way justify, [Gal 2:12](#)), and not as a Jew, *how* (so the oldest

Justification



A forensic term, opposed to condemnation.

As regards its nature, it is the judicial act of God, by which he pardons all the sins of those who believe in Christ, and accounts, accepts, and treats them as righteous in the eye of the law, i.e.,

as conformed to all its demands. In addition to the pardon (q.v.) of sin, justification declares that all the claims of the law are satisfied in respect of the justified. It is the act of a judge and not of a sovereign. The law is not relaxed or set aside, but is declared to be fulfilled in the strictest sense; and so the person justified is declared to be entitled to all the advantages and rewards arising from perfect obedience to the law ([Rom 5:1-10](#)).

It proceeds on the imputing or crediting to the believer by God himself of the perfect righteousness, active and passive, of his Representative and Surety, Jesus Christ ([Rom 10:3-9](#)). Justification is not the forgiveness of a man without righteousness, but a declaration that he possesses a righteousness which perfectly and for ever satisfies the law, namely, Christ's righteousness ([2Co 5:21](#); [Rom 4:6-8](#)).

The sole condition on which this righteousness is imputed or credited to the believer is faith in or on the Lord Jesus Christ. Faith is called a "condition," not because it possesses any merit, but only because it is the instrument, the only instrument by which the soul appropriates or apprehends Christ and his righteousness ([Rom 1:17](#); [Rom 3:25](#), [Rom 3:26](#); [Rom 4:20](#), [Rom 4:22](#); [Phi 3:8-11](#); [Gal 2:16](#)).

The act of faith which thus secures our justification secures also at the same time our sanctification (q.v.); and thus the doctrine of justification by faith does not lead to licentiousness ([Rom 6:2-7](#)). Good works, while not the ground, are the certain consequence of justification ([Rom 6:14](#); [Rom 7:6](#)).

manuscripts read, for 'why') is it that thou art compelling (virtually, by thine example) the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?" (literally, *to Judaize*, that is, to keep the ceremonial customs of the Jews: What had been formerly obedience to the law, is now mere *Judaism*). The high authority of Peter would constrain the Gentile Christians to regard Judaizing as necessary to all, since Jewish Christians could not consort with Gentile converts in communion without it.

(15) We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

Connect these verses together, and read with most of the oldest manuscripts "But" in the beginning of [Gal 2:16](#): "We (I and thou, Peter) by nature (not by proselytism), Jews, and not sinners as (Jewish language termed the Gentiles) from among the Gentiles, YET (literally, 'BUT') knowing that ... even we (resuming the 'we' of [Gal 2:15](#), 'we also,' as well as the Gentile sinners; casting away trust in the law), have believed," etc.

(16) yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have

believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

not justified by the works of the law — as the GROUND of justification. "The works of the law" are those which have the law for their object - which are wrought to fulfil the law [Alford].

but by — Translate, “But only (in no other way save) *through* faith in Jesus Christ,” as the MEAN and instrument of justification.

Jesus Christ — In the second case, read with the oldest manuscripts, “Christ Jesus,” the *Messiahship* coming into prominence in the case of *Jewish* believers, as “Jesus” does in the first case, referring to the general proposition.

justified by the faith of Christ — that is, by Christ, the object of faith, as the ground of our justification.

for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified — He rests his argument on this as an axiom in theology, referring to [Psa 143:2](#), “Moses and Jesus Christ; The law and the promise; Doing and believing; Works and faith; Wages and the gift; The curse and the blessing - are represented as diametrically opposed” [Bengel]. The moral law is, in respect to justification, *more legal* than the ceremonial, which was an elementary and preliminary Gospel: So “Sinai” ([Gal 4:24](#)), which is more famed for the Decalogue than for the ceremonial law, is made pre-eminently the type of legal bondage. Thus, justification by the law, whether the moral or ceremonial, is excluded ([Rom 3:20](#)).

(17) But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

Greek, “But if, seeking to be justified IN (that is, in believing *union with*) Christ (who has in the Gospel theory fulfilled the law for us), we (you and I) ourselves also *were* found (in *your* and *my former* communion with Gentiles) sinners (such as from the Jewish standpoint that now we resume, we should be regarded, since we have cast aside the law, thus having put ourselves in the same category as the Gentiles, who, being without the law, are, in the Jewish view, “sinners,” [Gal 2:15](#)), is therefore Christ, the minister of sin?” (Are we to admit the conclusion, in this case inevitable, that Christ having failed to justify us by faith, so has become to us the minister of sin, by putting us in the position of “sinners,” as the Judaic theory, if correct, would make us, along with all others who are “without the law,” [Rom 2:14](#); [1Co 9:21](#); and with whom, by eating with them, we have identified ourselves?) The Christian mind revolts from so shocking a conclusion, and so, from the theory which would result in it. The whole sin lies, not with Christ, but with him who would necessitate such a blasphemous inference. But his false theory, though “*seeking*” from Christ, we have not “found” salvation (in contradiction to Christ’s own words, [Mat 7:7](#)), but “have been ourselves also (like the Gentiles) *found*” to be “sinners,” by having entered into communion with Gentiles ([Gal 2:12](#)).

(18) For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

Greek, “For if the things which I overthrew (by the faith of Christ), those very things I build up again (namely, legal righteousness, by subjecting myself to the law), I prove myself (literally, ‘I commend myself’) a transgressor.” Instead of commending yourself as you sought to do ([Gal 2:12](#), end), you merely commend yourself as a transgressor. The “I” is intended by Paul for *Peter* to take to himself, as it is *his* case, not Paul’s own, that is described. A “transgressor” is another word for “sinner” (in [Gal 2:17](#)), for “sin is the *transgression* of the law.” You, Peter, by now asserting the law to be obligatory, are proving yourself a “sinner,” or “transgressor,” in your having set it aside by living as the Gentiles, and with them. Thus you are debarred by transgression from justification by the law, and you debar yourself from justification by Christ, since in your theory He becomes a minister of sin.

(19) For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.

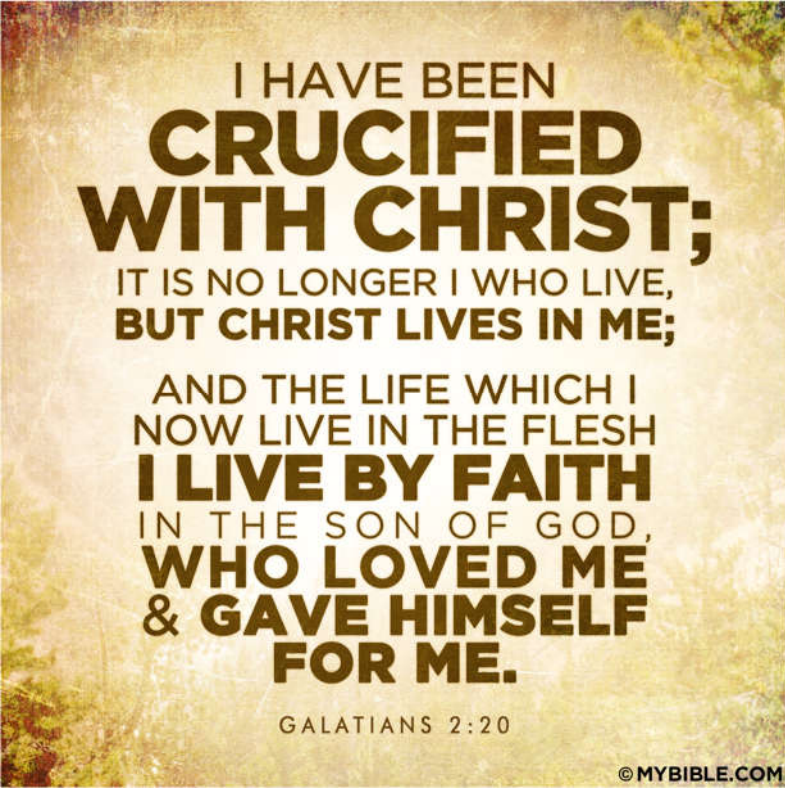
Here Paul seems to pass from his *exact words* to Peter, to the *general purport* of his argument on the question. However, his direct address to the Galatians seems not to be resumed till [Gal 3:1](#), “O foolish Galatians,” etc.

For — But I am not a “transgressor” by forsaking the law. “For,” etc. Proving his indignant

denial of the consequence that “Christ is the minister of sin” ([Gal 2:17](#)), and of the premises from which it would follow. Christ, so far from being the minister of sin and death, is the establisher of righteousness and life. I am entirely in Him [Bengel].

I — here emphatical. *Paul himself*, not *Peter*, as in the “I” ([Gal 2:18](#)).

through the law — which was my “schoolmaster to bring me to Christ” ([Gal 3:24](#)); both by its terrors ([Gal 3:13](#); [Rom 3:20](#)) driving me to Christ, as the refuge from God’s wrath against sin, and, when spiritually understood, teaching that itself is not permanent, but must give place to Christ, whom it prefigures as its scope and end ([Rom 10:4](#)); and drawing me to Him by its promises (in the prophecies which form part of the Old Testament law) of a better righteousness, and of God’s law written in the heart ([Deu 18:15-19](#); [Jer 31:33](#);



I HAVE BEEN
**CRUCIFIED
WITH CHRIST;**
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
& GAVE HIMSELF
FOR ME.**

GALATIANS 2:20

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[Act 10:43](#)).

am dead to the law — literally, “I died to the law,” and so *am* dead to it, that is, am passed from under its power, in respect to non-justification or condemnation ([Col 2:20](#); [Rom 6:14](#); [Rom 7:4](#), [Rom 7:6](#)); just as a woman, once married and bound to a husband, ceases to be so bound to him when death interposes, and may be lawfully married to another husband. So by believing union to Christ in His death, we, being considered dead with Him, are severed from the law’s past power over us (compare [Gal 6:14](#); [1Co 7:39](#); [Rom 6:6-11](#); [1Pe 2:24](#)).

live unto God — ([Rom 6:11](#); [2Co 5:15](#); [1Pe 4:1](#), [1Pe 4:2](#)).

(20) I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I am crucified — literally, “I have been crucified with Christ.” This more particularizes the foregoing. “I am dead” ([Gal 2:19](#); [Phi 3:10](#)).

nevertheless I live; yet not I — *Greek*, “nevertheless I live, no longer (indeed) I.” Though crucified I live; (and this) no longer that old man such as I once was (compare [Rom 7:17](#)). No longer Saul the Jew ([Gal 5:24](#); [Col 3:11](#), but “another man”; compare [1Sa 10:6](#)). Ellicott and others translate, “And it is no longer I that live, but Christ that liveth in me.” But the plain antithesis between “crucified” and “live,” requires the translation, “nevertheless.”

the life which I now live — as contrasted with my life before conversion.

in the flesh — My life seems to be a mere animal life “in the flesh,” but this is not my true life; “it is but the mask of life under which lives another, namely, Christ, who is my true life” [Luther].

I live by the faith, etc. — *Greek*, “IN faith (namely), that of (that is, which rests on) the Son of God.” “In faith,” answers by contrast to “in the flesh.” *Faith*, not *the flesh*, is the real element in which I live. The phrase, “the Son of God,” reminds us that His Divine Sonship is the source of His life-giving power.

loved me — His eternal gratuitous love is the link that unites me to the Son of God, and His “giving Himself for me,” is the strongest proof of that love.

(21) I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

I do not frustrate the grace of God — I do not *make it void*, as thou, Peter, art doing by Judaizing.

for — justifying the strong expression “frustrate,” or “make void.”

is dead in vain — *Greek*, “Christ died needlessly,” or “without just cause.” Christ’s having died, shows that the law has no power to justify us; for if the law can justify or make us righteous, the death of Christ is superfluous [Chrysostom].

