



Galatians - Chapter Two

II. Galatians 1:11-2:21 - Indirect Appeal: Paul's Career with the Gospel (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Two

Paul demonstrated in the previous chapter that he was independent of the apostles in Jerusalem and that the Gospel he had brought to the Galatians was genuine. His continuing autobiography shows it is ludicrous for the Galatians to discard Paul's Gospel as if it were a second hand, abbreviated version that needed to be supplemented with additional instructions from the Jerusalem apostles.

Paul shows that he did not spend enough time with the original apostles in Jerusalem to get his Gospel second-hand from them. Since Paul's Gospel was given by a revelation from God, the Galatian believers should have maintained unswerving loyalty to it. However, what he did achieve during his time with the other apostles was to gain recognition for his work and their approval of what he was doing with the Gentiles.

Paul recounts a painful confrontation between himself and Peter over an issue in Antioch that Paul found to be unacceptable behaviour in terms of the Gospel. To understand the nature of the conflict and the issues involved, it can be observed how the drama developed in four stages:

1. Peter's practice of eating with the Gentile Christians.
2. Peter's separation from Gentile Christians after the arrival of the delegation from James because of his fear of the circumcision group.
3. The separation of the other Jewish Christians from Gentile Christians because of Peter's influence.
4. Paul's rebuke of Peter.

Paul focuses the argument of who is God's true Israel, his chosen people. Is it the Gentiles? Is it only Jews and proselytes? Paul's statement at the end of this chapter reveals the answer: <<*it is Christ who lives in me*>> (v.20). That is, those who are in Christ, so that which is true of him is also true of them.

Whatever else the reader may take from Paul's writings, the unity and spiritual integrity of the church was always uppermost in his mind, as well as the fundamental issue of who a person truly is in Christ!

II.b Galatians 2:1-10 - Paul and the Other Apostles

Paul is not simply recounting a story from his past. All this is highly relevant to the Galatians in the present, who are being influenced by ideas that go against the consensus of the apostles.

Paul pays a second visit to Jerusalem, not to learn the Gospel for he knew it by divine revelation, but to share with the other apostles the Gospel he had proclaimed to the Gentiles. He also raises the issues of false believers who had infiltrated the church. Although there are those who opposed Paul in Jerusalem, he did reach a consensus with James, Peter and John as to how each group should proceed with their work.

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

Galatians 2:1

After fourteen years. There is debate as to whether this visit took place an additional 14 years after the three years mentioned in Galatians 1:18 or whether the 14 years started from Paul's conversion and includes those three. The latter seems slightly more probable, placing this visit circa AD47. It probably corresponds to Acts 11:29-30 rather than to the Jerusalem Council visit in Acts 15. Refer to the comments made on Acts 11:27-30.

Barnabas was a Levite from Cyprus. His name was actually Joseph but he was given his nickname, which means 'son of encouragement', because that is what he was to the early church: <<*There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas (which means 'son of encouragement'). He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet*>> (Acts 4:36-37).

Taking Titus along. Titus was a Gentile, so some have seen this as Paul issuing a challenge to the Jerusalem leaders. This interpretation is unnecessary, but Titus was certainly a test case, as v.3 indicates. What Paul was really demonstrating was that his ministry team represented a unified church.

² I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

Galatians 2:2

I went up in response to a revelation could either indicate that Paul was instructed by God to go to Jerusalem or that he had received a revelation that he felt duty bound to explain to the other apostles. What it reinforces is that Paul was

neither directed by external parties nor self-interest; he was directed by God alone, led by the Spirit.

I laid before them, the gospel that I proclaim. Paul had nothing to fear through an open debate about the Gospel for he knew that it was authentic. Debate in church should be encouraged as it is a primary way of understanding God's Word and his ways. Doing so openly is the right way for it ensures that there is no hidden agenda for those who are raised up to share the message. Paul's own advice is: **<<Do not despise the words of prophets, but test everything; hold fast to what is good>>** (1 Thessalonians 5:20-21).

Paul met the others in a private meeting probably to allow for full and frank discussion without being sidetracked by the types of questions or opinions that are frequently offered during public gatherings.

The acknowledged leaders probably included James, Peter and John (v.9).

In vain. Paul is not seriously imagining that he has actually been preaching a false Gospel, but he would regard his work as running in vain if it were to result in a divided church – a Gentile half and a Jewish half.

Paul often likened the Christian life to running a race, encouraging others to run to win: **<<Do you not know that in a race the runners all compete, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win it>>** (1 Corinthians 9:24), and believing that his own race had been run successfully: **<<I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith>>** (2 Timothy 4:7).

³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ But because of false believers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us –

Galatians 2:3-4

There is agreement: Titus – and so by implication all Gentiles - Paul uses the term Greek here – did not need to be circumcised. Or at least Paul, James, Peter, and John agreed on this. There is, however, a group of false believers who continue to disagree and were there to spy on Paul's team, no doubt so they could better prepare their opposition to him. Such occurrences as this were repeated elsewhere, such as: **<<For certain intruders have stolen in among you, people who long ago were designated for this condemnation as ungodly, who pervert the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ>>** (Jude 4).

Paul regards the imposition of circumcision on Gentile Christians as slavery, i.e. so that they might enslave us, producing betrayal of the freedom Christ has given.

From the tone of Paul's writing it appears there may have been a rumour started by his opponents that Titus had been circumcised so that he could enjoy the full fellowship of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Paul wholeheartedly refutes such an allegation.

Of course, Paul did have Timothy circumcised before commencing his ministry because he was half Jewish and his father, a Greek, had apparently opposed his circumcision when he was eight days old. Paul decided it would be better for Timothy to be circumcised to avoid it being a barrier to him proclaiming the Gospel to Jews in the region of Galatia: <<*Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek*>> (Acts 16:3). The circumstances with Titus and all Gentiles however are very different.

With regard to circumcision refer to Acts 15:1-35, Romans 2:25-29 and 4:9-16, Galatians 5:2-12, and 6:12-15; as well as the associated comments.

The presence of these false believers within the church in Jerusalem shows that churches will sometimes have unbelievers in their midst who seek to harm the church and its reputation in the wider community. Paul saw them as a danger to himself and the church: <<*on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters*>> (2 Corinthians 11:26).

⁵ we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.

Galatians 2:5

We did not submit to them. Unity in the church can be secure only when there is no compromise of the essentials of the Gospel. Working toward unity does not mean a passive submission to misguided zealots. Paul's response to the false believers was of huge importance, because if he had yielded, Gentiles such as the Galatians would not have been brought the truth of Gospel. Paul would never yield for he knew that the Gospel he proclaimed was from God and that could not be altered in any way. The truth of the Gospel is non-negotiable!

⁶ And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – those leaders contributed nothing to me.

Galatians 2:6

Those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders. Paul's tone may sound derogatory in this verse but in v.9 he refers to Peter, John and James as pillars.

God shows no partiality. God is no respecter of persons with regard to their social status, wealth or capability. He chooses people because of their heart's motivation towards him and the work they are called to do. Peter concurred when he visited the Roman Centurion Cornelius: <<*Then Peter began to speak to them: 'I truly understand that God shows no partiality, but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him*>> (Acts 10:34-35), and Jesus promises: <<*And all the churches will know that I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each of you as your works deserve*>> (Revelation 2:23b).

Those leaders contributed nothing to me. Paul is in no way inferior to the apostles who had been called before him for had received his revelation of the Gospel directly from the Lord and therefore, no human no matter what they had personally learned by being close to Jesus, could add to what Paul had been shown. This does not mean that Paul did not acknowledge their unique role or the importance of their work as apostles. After all, John and Peter were acknowledged as being closest to Jesus and had served him on earth. James had grown up knowing Jesus as an elder brother. However, the Gospel is not judged by great leaders, great leaders are judged by the Gospel!

Another point that Paul makes is that it does not matter who proclaims the Gospel or why, providing it is the true Gospel that is shared: <<*Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe*>> (1 Corinthians 15:11), and: <<*What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice. Yes, and I will continue to rejoice*>> (Philippians 1:18).

⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles),

Galatians 2:7-8

When they saw that I had been entrusted with the Gospel. Being apostles themselves, these leaders would not only have recognised the content of Paul's teaching but the divine inspiration behind it: <<*but just as we have been approved by God to be entrusted with the message of the gospel, even so we speak, not to please mortals, but to please God who tests our hearts*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:4), and: <<*the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me*>> (1 Timothy 1:11b).

For he who worked through Peter, also worked through me. The work of God was effectual and irrefutable in Peter and in Paul, even though they were to work with different groups: Jews and Gentiles respectively.

As an apostle, Paul was in no way inferior to Peter. It was merely a division of labour, with Paul assigned to evangelise the uncircumcised, i.e. Gentiles, while Peter was sent to the circumcised Jews. What Paul wants to establish for the Galatians, however, is that his own apostleship is just as genuine as Peter's, and therefore the Galatians should not view themselves as inferior to any other group of believers.

It should be remembered that Paul did take the Gospel to the Jewish communities in each town he visited and that Peter also evangelised Gentiles, such as the household of Cornelius, as recorded in Acts 10. Before the church leaders in Jerusalem, Peter defended the Gospel being taken to the Gentiles in Acts 11:1-19, and again at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), which ended with James concluding that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised.

⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognised the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Galatians 2:9

If the church is God's temple: <<*In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord*>> (Ephesians 2:21), some had apparently made Peter, i.e. Cephas, James and John the pillars. The term means more than just 'pillars of the church community', Paul refers to them here as part of the church's foundational strength, an honour Christ bestows on the faithful: <<*If you conquer, I will make you a pillar in the temple of my God; you will never go out of it. I will write on you the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem that comes down from my God out of heaven, and my own new name*>> (Revelation 3:12).

Significantly, these pillars had given the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and Paul, signifying that they approved the message of the Gospel as preached by Paul, as well as his ministry to the Gentiles. Thus they validated Paul's apostleship by putting him on an equal footing with the other apostles in Jerusalem. This is significant, because it shows that neither Paul nor the Jerusalem apostles had to change their Gospel message, but they were fully in agreement, and this right hand of fellowship gave clear expression to that agreement.

¹⁰ They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.

Galatians 2:10

Remember the poor. Verses 7-9 mark out the division of labour between Peter, whose primary ministry was to the Jews, and for Paul to go to the Gentiles. However, there was one area of clear overlap: Paul was to organise collections for the poor, almost certainly referring mainly to poor Christians in all Judæa, who were Jewish. Here, the unity of the church is maintained by practical service.

A major theme of Paul's teaching to his Gentile churches was their obligation to support the Jerusalem church. Paul saw the collection that he took from his Gentile churches for the Jewish believers in Judæa as an indispensable expression of the unity of the church. It is recorded elsewhere that Paul did, in fact, undertake a major relief effort on their behalf: <<*At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem in a ministry to the saints; for Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to share their resources with the poor among the saints at Jerusalem*>> (Romans 15:25-26), and: <<*Now concerning the collection for the saints: you should follow the directions I gave to the churches of Galatia. On the first day of every week, each of you is to put aside and save whatever extra you earn, so that collections need not be taken when I come. And when I arrive, I will send any whom you approve with letters to take your gift to Jerusalem*>> (1 Corinthians 16:1-3); refer also to 2 Corinthians 8-9. Paul personally escorted the offering to Jerusalem: <<*Now after some years I came to bring alms to my nation and to offer sacrifices*>> (Acts 24:17).

Paul's concern for the poor as evidenced here is in accord with the broader principle demonstrated throughout Scripture that genuine preaching of the Gospel in every age must be accompanied by the meeting of physical needs as well, just as Jesus healed the sick, cast out demons and raised the dead along with his preaching ministry.

II.c Galatians 2:11-21 - Paul's opposition to Peter, to preserve the truth of the Gospel

Paul had said that he was not a people-pleaser (1:10), and his confrontation with Peter as reported here bears that out. It is unclear when Paul's speech to Peter stops and his direct address to the Galatians begins again, but vv.15-16, which commences with: <<***We ourselves are Jews by birth***>>, was surely addressed to the apostle Peter.

II.c.i Galatians 2:11-14 - Paul Rebukes Peter at Antioch

When Peter visited the church in Antioch he was influenced by some men from Jerusalem not to fully associate with the Gentile Christians. Paul publically challenged Peter over his behaviour for it was contrary to the Gospel.

Some early church leaders, Origen, Chrysostom and Jerome, could not believe that this conflict really occurred. They explained that Paul and Peter must have staged the conflict to illustrate the issues at stake. Augustine, however, interpreted the story as a genuine dispute in which Paul established the higher claim of the truth of the Gospel over the rank and office of Peter.

¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; ¹² for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.

Galatians 2:11-12

I opposed him to his face. The setting of Paul's personal and public confrontation with Peter was the church in Syrian Antioch, Paul's missionary base for a number of years. Peter had been participating in meals where Jewish and Gentile Christians ate together, a practice elsewhere that brought him a personal rebuke: <<***So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticised him, saying, 'Why did you go to uncircumcised men and eat with them?'***>> (Acts 11:2-3), but in Antioch he drew back and kept himself separate, eating only with Jewish Christians.

Such public confrontation is seen by many as a no win situation, damaging to all concerned. Although there are many in the church who might avoid such confrontations at all costs, Paul at least recognised that it would be more damaging to the faith of many in the church not to challenge Peter on this occasion. Not an easy decision to make but a necessary one.

Interpreters differ in their explanations of this situation in this passage. One view is that these men, who were probably sent from the Jerusalem church by the

apostle James, encouraged Jewish Christians to eat separately and follow kosher dietary laws. Peter decided to go along with this, perhaps not realising that his example would make the Gentile Christians feel like second-class citizens in the church unless they followed Jewish ceremonial laws, such as the dietary laws, circumcision, and holidays and festivals. Paul saw that Peter's behaviour threatened the Gospel of justification by faith alone because it implied that all Christians had to <<*live like Jews*>> (v.14), in order to be justified before God.

It cannot be fully established if these men were sent by James personally or just claimed to be representing the Jerusalem church, perhaps carrying letters of introduction from James. Refer to the comments on 2 Corinthians 3:1 regarding such letters. At the Jerusalem Council it was James who agreed to write a letter to the churches to clearly state that they did not have to follow Jewish customs (Acts 15:23-29); he also made it clear in Jerusalem that it was the fictitious rumours about Paul instructing Jews to turn away from their traditions that were of real concern: <<*After greeting them, he related one by one the things that God had done among the Gentiles through his ministry. When they heard it, they praised God. Then they said to him, 'You see, brother, how many thousands of believers there are among the Jews, and they are all zealous for the law. They have been told about you that you teach all the Jews living among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, and that you tell them not to circumcise their children or observe the customs'*>> (Acts 21:19-21). These men remain anonymous because it did not matter who they were; what is important here is the invalidity of their message and Peter's ready acceptance of it.

To eat with the Gentiles would mean not eating according to Jewish dietary restrictions. The circumcision faction advocated following the ceremonies of the Mosaic covenant law at least regarding circumcision, food and special festivals. In Antioch table-fellowship had become highly symbolic for it represented the true acceptance of all, a key message of the Gospel.

There were two fundamental reasons why Paul would have chosen to rebuke Peter rather than the whole group: his true apostleship held him in high esteem among the other believers; and what he was doing went against his own experience of God's grace, including God's revelation to him in Joppa: <<*And as he talked with him, he went in and found that many had assembled; and he said to them, 'You yourselves know that it is unlawful for a Jew to associate with or to visit a Gentile; but God has shown me that I should not call anyone profane or unclean'*>> (Acts 10:27-28). Peter, after all, had been Jesus' right-hand man, and the Judaizers would have taken every opportunity to use his reputation to further their own argument. However, since it is unknown whether Peter had the revelation before or after his visit to Antioch, it is difficult to determine Peter's true understanding at the time of the incident in Antioch that Paul is referring to.

Given that Paul records Peter as originally being a full participant in sharing meals with Gentiles, probably including sharing in the Lord's Supper with them, it seems most likely that this incident in Antioch occurred sometime after Peter's vision in Joppa as described in Acts 10.

But why did Peter fear these Jews since he was a pillar of the Jerusalem church and had fearlessly proclaimed the Gospel in Jerusalem despite facing severe opposition and punishment at the hands of the Sanhedrin?

It seems that during the late forties and fifties AD, Jewish Christians in Judæa were facing bitter antagonism from Zealot-minded Jews for socialising with Gentiles. The fierce Jewish nationalism, rampant in Palestine at that time, led to harsh treatment of any Jew who associated with Gentiles. It is likely that the delegation from James simply reported to Peter that his open and unrestricted association with Gentiles in Antioch would cause, or had already caused, the church in Jerusalem to suffer greatly at the hands of the circumcision group, Jewish nationalists.

If Peter expressed his own reason for separating from the Gentiles in Antioch, he may well have voiced his concern about the detrimental effect his table-fellowship with Gentiles had on the Jerusalem church's mission to the Jews. When non-Christian Jews in Jerusalem heard that Peter, a prominent church leader, was eating with Gentiles in Antioch, they would not only turn away from the witness of the church but also become actively hostile toward the church for tolerating such a practice. Confronted by these practical concerns for his home church and its mission to the Jews, Peter may have acted against his own better judgment by separating himself from the Gentiles.

¹³ And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

Galatians 2:13

Not only was Peter guilty of hypocrisy; as an influential leader, he also led astray the rest of the Jewish Christians, even Barnabas, who had been a leading member of the Antiochian church for some time, having been sent there by the Jerusalem church: <<*News of this came to the ears of the church in Jerusalem, and they sent Barnabas to Antioch*>> (Acts 11:22).

Hypocrisy comes from a Greek word meaning actor. However, even by Paul's day it had become widely known to represent one who is deceitfully playing a part that has no bearing to the reality of who they are, or the truth of what they believe.

The question of Peter's play-acting, therefore, first in his eating with non-Jewish Christians and then in his refusal to do so, is intimately related to the question raised earlier, whether Gentile Christians had to be circumcised in order to belong to God's people. It is all part of the same issue, the issue that was urgently at stake in Galatia itself.

Barnabas too was an influential figure in the church by this time. It was he who introduced Paul to the other apostles when he was initially shunned by the church because of his former reputation (Acts 9:27), it was he who was sent by the church to authenticate what those in Antioch were doing and it was he who was strong enough to accept this new practice of allowing Gentiles and Jews to freely mix in a unified church. Therefore, his actions on this occasion would have been both damaging to the church and disappointing to Paul.

¹⁴ But when I saw that they were not acting consistently 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 compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'

Galatians 2:14

They were not acting consistently with the truth. Paul wants to make the point irrefutable that what went on in Antioch did not represent either the Gospel or the true Peter, who was a faithful servant of Jesus. He had been led astray by those who had their own agenda and through his influence, he was leading others astray.

Before them all. Because Peter's sin was a public sin that was setting a bad example for the church, Paul confronted him publicly. It is worth comparing the different procedure that Jesus commands regarding a private sin against an individual person, which hopefully can be corrected privately: <<*If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. Again, truly I tell you, if two of you agree on earth about anything you ask, it will be done for you by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them*>> (Matthew 18:15-20). James summarises the desired outcomes of such correction: <<*My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins*>> (James 5:19-20).

Compel the Gentiles to live like Jews. Peter was guilty of hypocrisy (v.13) because, although he had been happily living like a Gentile, i.e. not observing food laws, he was now requiring Gentile Christians to observe Jewish table regulations if they wanted to eat with him. Such a requirement, however, would undermine the Gospel itself by making justification depend on 'works of the law' rather than 'faith in Jesus Christ' (v.16).

To put it simply, Peter's separation had violated his own conviction that the racial division between Jews and Gentiles should not exist in the church. As a consequence of his separation, Gentiles were not admitted to table-fellowship with Jews in the church. And the only way for them to gain admission was to become Jews.

What happened to Peter is reminiscent of a night on the Sea of Galilee long before: <<*Peter answered him, 'Lord, if it is you, command me to come to you on the water.'* He said, 'Come.' So Peter got out of the boat, started walking on the water, and came towards Jesus. But when he noticed the strong wind, he became frightened, and beginning to sink, he cried out, 'Lord, save me!'>>

(Matthew 14:28-30). By accepting Gentiles at his table Peter had got out of the boat but, once again, Peter had seen the choppy waters of Jewish opinion and had started to sink!

It is easy to sit back at a safe distance and be critical of the actions of Peter here and even at the time of his denial, e.g. John 18:15-18. Yet no one really knows that they will do in any given situation until they are forced to face it.

II.c.ii Galatians 2:15-21 - Jews and Gentiles Are Saved by Faith

Paul now argues that since it has been shown that the law cannot save and that justification comes through faith in Christ alone, then all who have faith in Jesus are saved, irrespective of ethnicity. Jews and Gentiles are in it together!

Paul's argument with Peter and now with the Galatian church is not about interpretations of the Gospel, or indeed of the Jewish law, it is more fundamental than that - it is about Christian identity!

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

Galatians 2:15

We ourselves are Jews by birth. Paul never renounced his Jewish heritage: <<*If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee*>> (Philippians 3:4b-5). He had simply come to understand that it was no longer a necessary requirement in order to be faithful to God as he had previously believed.

Gentile sinners are those who do not even attempt to follow the OT laws and therefore clearly do not live up to them.

¹⁶ yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law.

Galatians 2:16

Yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law. Paul's heritage, along with many of his peers, was rooted in their identity as God's people through their ethnicity and their observance of the law. Paul goes on to show that all what has gone before counts for nothing unless one truly embraces the Gospel of Christ. Paul saw that Christ had taught justification by faith, and so he called God the one: <<*who justifies the ungodly*>> (Romans 4:5b). Paul will soon show that this view was taught even in the OT, refer to Galatians 3:6-18, although it was not the view of most in 1st Century Judaism. For example, a 1st Century BC Jewish writing states, 'The one who does righteousness stores up life for himself with the Lord, and the one who does wickedness is the cause of the destruction of his own soul' (Psalms of Solomon 9.5). Here, works of the law

means not only circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance, but any human effort to be justified by God through obedience to a moral law.

Justified is used three times in this verse and once more in v.17, and means counted righteous or declared righteous by God. If people were sinless and able to fully obey all of God's perfect moral standards, they could be **justified** or declared righteous on the basis of their own merits. But Paul says that this is impossible for any Gentile or even for any Jew to do. Paul argues this more fully in Romans 1-2.

Justification or righteousness can mean different things to different people. Paul generally uses it related to God's promise to Abraham, now fulfilled in Christ, that God would create a single worldwide family whose identity-marker would be faith. It speaks of the family identity, the status of covenant membership, which God gives to all his family, to all who believe the Gospel. Out beyond that, it speaks gloriously of God's saving justice embracing and healing the whole unjust world, and rescuing in the present those men, women and children who trust his love as revealed in Jesus.

Faith in Jesus Christ. Some contend that the Greek means the 'faithfulness of Jesus Christ'. However, **faith in Jesus Christ** seems much more likely since it is synonymous with the next phrase **we have come to believe in Christ Jesus**. **But through faith in Jesus Christ** is the opposite of depending on one's own good deeds for justification, since justification comes through faith in Christ alone.

So that we might be justified by faith in Christ implies that justification is the result of saving faith. The contrast **and not by doing the works of the law** shows clearly that no human effort or merit can be added to faith as a basis for justification. This verse was frequently appealed to in the Reformation by Protestants who insisted on 'justification by faith alone' as opposed to the Roman Catholic doctrine of justification by faith plus merit gained through the 'means of grace' administered by means of the Roman Catholic sacraments, such as penance and the Mass. Paul concludes decisively: **no one will be justified by the works of the law**, a paraphrase of Psalm 143:2. Refer to Acts 13:39, Galatians 3:10-14 and Hebrews 10:1-14 for further confirmation on justification by faith alone rather than through the law.

For more on justification refer to the comments made on Romans 4:25, Philippians 3:9 and James 2:21.

¹⁷ But if, in our effort to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not!

Galatians 2:17

Found to be sinners. Paul has just discussed how Gentiles are known among Jews as sinners (v.15). When Jewish Christians associate with them, they are liable to the charge from traditionalist Jews of becoming sinners themselves by negating to keep the food laws, which is the context here. The accusers understood correctly that the Jewish Christians were eating with Gentile Christians because of their common faith in Christ. Therefore their faith in Christ led them into the sin of breaking Jewish purity laws. If identification with Christ promoted unlawful

identification with Gentiles, then, it was argued, Christ promotes sin, i.e. is Christ then a servant of sin? Paul firmly dismisses any such charges - certainly not!

Those justified by faith in Christ are still sinners and still unable to fulfil all righteousness. The criticism put forth is that believers can then do whatever they want, and Christ is blamed, as if he condoned such sinning. God forbids such a false position. Believers are joined to Christ - a new creation, no longer under the power of sin and empowered to follow Christ in word and deed, in order to bring glory to God.

¹⁸ But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor.

Galatians 2:18

But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down refers in part to the example Paul gave of Peter initially content to eat with Gentile believers and then refraining from doing so to keep face with the traditionalists from Jerusalem. It is the latter that Paul sees as the transgression, building a partition in the centre of the church and the Gospel it is founded upon. However, in its fullest context the statement refers to the whole law. Jewish Christians have torn down the restrictions of the law by accepting Christ. They are not to rebuild the dividing wall between freedom in Christ and the yoke of the law. To rebuild the law would mean to reinstate the law for the supervision of the Christian life. If the law is reinstated, then the Christian is proved to be a transgressor.

I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. Ironically, the one who is most clearly seen to be a sinner is not the one outside of the law, i.e. the Gentile, but the one who is under it. So, if Paul were to reintroduce the edifice of the law, he would merely prove that he stands condemned. Paul indicates this again in a later letter: *<<For the law brings wrath; but where there is no law, neither is there violation>>* (Romans 4:15).

To go back to observing the law so obviously opens up the criticism that Christ and his sacrifice on the Cross was insufficient, and that believers still have to work according to the law for salvation. This is wrong; to do this, Paul would make himself a transgressor. This was also the danger that Paul had observed and openly opposed in Peter's actions at Antioch.

¹⁹ For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ;

Galatians 2:19

Through the law. Paul is not talking about a conscious experience of being dissatisfied with the law, but about how he was unknowingly caught up in God's plan in which the law actually pronounced the sentence of death on Paul's old way of life. It can be seen that death to the law through the law is accomplished by identification with the death of Christ. Since believers have been crucified with Christ they have also died to the law and therefore the law can no longer condemn them.

Paul has died to the law probably meaning that he no longer lives in the realm of trying to gain justification by obeying the law and that therefore the law can place no demands on him. Paul died to the law, he says, so that I might live to God: <<*The death he died, he died to sin, once for all; but the life he lives, he lives to God. So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus*>> (Romans 6:10-11). That is, since he is no longer under the impossible burden of trying to earn acceptance with God through his own efforts, he has gained God's approval through the justification that is in Christ, and in this new relationship with God he has found an amazing new freedom to live a life devoted to God. Thus Paul is always seeking to live in a way that pleases God, yet not at all depending on his own actions for justification.

I have been crucified with Christ. Christ fulfilled the law and yet was put to death to pay the price for humankind's sins. Paul's former self, the person Paul was before he trusted Christ, with all of his sinful goals and proud, self-exalting desires, came to a decisive end – he died.

²⁰ and it is no longer I who live, but it is 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.

Galatians 2:20

It is no longer I who live does not mean that Paul has no personality or individual will of his own, clearly all his writings show that he does, but that his own personal interests and goals no longer direct his life; rather, Christ who lives in me now directs and empowers all that he does: <<*But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness*>> (Romans 8:10), and: <<*Since therefore Christ suffered in the flesh, arm yourselves also with the same intention (for whoever has suffered in the flesh has finished with sin), so as to live for the rest of your earthly life no longer by human desires but by the will of God*>> (1 Peter 4:1-2). How then does he, as a 'crucified man', gain any strength to go on living? It would be a mistake to take Paul's words as a proof text for total passivity in the Christian experience. The very next phrase underscores the necessity of active faith.

The life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God. Paul seems to be saying that, as he trusts Christ moment by moment, Christ then works in and through Paul to give spiritual effectiveness to all that he does. The experience of union with Christ, as expressed here by Paul, is a mystical experience in the sense that it transcends rational explanation; direct, intimate communion with God in Christ cannot be fully described.

Who loved me and gave himself for me. The fact that, on the Cross, Jesus bore believers' sins as their personal, individual substitute shows that the crucifixion was not an impersonal, mechanical transaction, but a most personal expression of Christ's love for people as individuals. God provided through his Son that which no mere mortal did or ever could do.

²¹ I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Galatians 2:21

When Paul turned from the law to live entirely by faith in Jesus as the promised Christ of God he did not nullify the grace of God. Instead, he fully embraced it.

Paul returns to the hypothetical situation raised in v.18 of imagining that the law was back in force again as a means by which he was trying to earn justification. In that case, if justification comes through the law, then Christ's death would have been pointless, for people could earn their own justification by their obedience. But in fact, this is something they can never do. This highlights the depth of the human problem; it cannot be remedied by the God-given law. Sin is so serious that only the substitutionary, atoning death of God's Son can deal with the problem. God's grace in the Gospel must therefore be humbly and thankfully accepted as the only way of salvation.

Christ died for nothing. If justification could be achieved through any other method, e.g. observance of the law, personal achievement, etc. then there would have been no requirement for Jesus to come to earth let alone die in such horrific circumstances. It is only through the sacrificial death of Jesus that salvation is offered to the world.