

**CHRIST LIVING IN US**  
**(Studies in Galatians)**  
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In 1930, Charles R. Erdman published a rather small commentary on the Apostle Paul's Epistle to the Galatians. The dedication of the commentary reads: "To all who love liberty, who deplore license, and who seek to fulfill the law of Christ." Then, in a brief foreword, Erdman has this to say about the Epistle to the Galatians:

A fugitive letter, written in the first century to obscure groups of Christians, was destined to become the *Magna Charta* of spiritual freedom for the whole world and for all time. This Epistle to the Galatians forms an essential chapter in the history of the Early Church. It was a vital cause of the great religious movement which dispelled the spiritual darkness of the Middle Ages. Its widest field of usefulness, however, is afforded by conditions of the present day. Wherever religion has lost its reality, wherever ritual is more regarded than right living, wherever subscription to a creed is substituted for submission to Christ, wherever loud claims of orthodoxy are accompanied by conduct devoid of charity, wherever deeds of self-righteousness are obscuring the glory of the cross, there this epistle should be made to sound out its clarion call to a new dependence upon justifying grace, to a faith that is shown by works, to a walk that is by the Spirit, to a life inspired by love.

I do not think that it is too much to claim that Galatians is Paul's most autobiographical letter. We have Paul's own account of his conversion to Christ and his commission from Christ. The risen Christ not only *informed* Paul, He also *transformed* Paul. And the transformed Paul stopped persecuting Christ and started preaching Christ.

I ask you, what changed Saul into Paul? Did he discover a red-letter edition of the Mosaic Law which highlighted truths he had never seen before? Did he find a copy of the Ten Commandments to which had been appended all of the dos and don'ts of Jewish tradition? Did he stumble upon a long-lost scroll entitled *The Pharisees Guide to Self-Righteous Living*? (In modern lingo, this scroll would have been called *Legalism for*

*Dummies*.) What changed Saul into Paul? It was his encounter with and his experience of the risen Christ.

Before I proceed any further in our study of Galatians, I want to make two observations. First, the cluster of words “just, justify, justification, right, righteous, and righteousness” all derive from the same Greek root. To be justified is to be made righteous. After all, we do not say someone was righteous-fied. We speak of possessing righteousness, not possessing justi-ness. We describe Christ’s work as one of justification, not one of righteous-fication. Now, the question is, when Paul writes about Christians being justified or being made righteous, is he referring to a *status conferred* or to a *quality of life lived*? Does being righteous mean that we have a right relationship with God or does it mean that we live morally upright lives? The answer is “Yes.” It means both. Through Christ, God declares us righteous, and through the Holy Spirit, God makes us righteous. Justification is God’s way of making us right with Him and making us to be like Him.

Second, when Paul refers to “works of the law,” is he talking about nomism or is he talking about legalism? Again, the answer is “Yes.” Nomism is trying to be saved by keeping the law. Legalism is trying to earn salvation by keeping the law. The two are related. However, it is possible to keep the law without being a legalist. I think of Moses or the prophets or Jesus. To put it another way, legalism is a perversion of nomism. Legalism is an overly-strict and self-righteous keeping of the law. Here is, I believe, what Paul is saying in Galatians: no system of law-keeping—even if the law is the Mosaic Law which God Himself gave—can do what Jesus Christ has done. We will come back to this point. Furthermore, if a legal approach to God won’t work, then a legalistic approach certainly won’t work.

Ok, let’s begin reading at chapter 2, verse 11.

But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned; 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. And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 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?”

We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 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. 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! But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 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. I do not nullify the grace of God; for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing (2:11-21, NRSV).

Notice the last phrase: “for if justification comes through the law, then Christ died for nothing.” If we could have been put right with God by means of the law, then Christ died in vain. Christ accomplished on the cross what the law could not accomplish. The law could not give life. The law could not make a person good. The law could not empower the believer to do God’s will. The law could inform, but it could not transform.

Back in the days when folks argued about whether the world was flat or round, the story is told of a young man who aspired to be a science schoolteacher. As the story goes, he was having a hard time finding a job. Finally, after many failed attempts, he was being interviewed. Everything about the interview was going great. It seemed certain that the young man was going to be hired. The interview came down to one last question: “Do you believe the earth is flat or round?” The young man thought a minute, and then said, “I can teach it both ways.”

In Gal 2:16, we have a difficult choice to make. There is one phrase than can be translated one of two ways; and to be honest, I can teach it both ways. Most versions read something like this: “we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith *in* Jesus Christ.” The KJV reads: “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith *of* Jesus Christ.” Is Jesus Christ the *object* of faith or is He the *subject* of faith? Is Paul saying that we are made right with God by putting our faith in Jesus Christ or is he saying that we are made right with God by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ who died for us? I do not have a conclusive answer. Personally, I prefer the KJV translation. Paul is saying that we are not put right with God

on the basis of the Mosaic Law but on the basis of the cross of Christ; therefore, we do not put our faith in the works of the law but in the work of Christ. It is not the law, but it is Christ who makes righteousness a possibility for each one of us. After all, if we could have been put right with God by means of the law, then Christ died in vain.

Following in the footsteps of the church father Augustine and the reformer Martin Luther, it is all too common to individualize Paul's concept of justification. Seen this way, the essential question becomes: How can I, a sinful person, find acceptance in the eyes of a holy and righteous God? But this is *not* Paul's question. The context here is a social setting, not an individual setting. Paul's discussion of justification arises out of his reflections on and defense of the Gentile's entrance into the church. In the first 10 verses of chapter 2, Paul expresses his concern that his missionary work not be in vain. What Paul is saying is this, "If my preaching of the gospel produces the Gentile church which is separate from the Jewish church, then all my efforts have been for nothing. If the cross of Christ cannot break down the barriers between Jew and Gentile, bringing them together into one body, then Christ died in vain." In other words, if Jesus Christ cannot save everyone, He cannot save anyone.

Then, in verses 11-14, Paul relates the story of his public rebuking of Peter. Why did Paul rebuke Peter? Because Peter was inconsistent. Even though Peter preached that God was no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34-35), he had disfellowshipped himself from the Gentiles. Peter did not practice what he preached.

So, in verse 15, when Paul takes up his discussion of justification, the specific point that he wants to make is that God's grace in Christ means by its very nature that Gentiles are included in the Christian community on no different level and on no different terms than Jews. Jew and Gentile alike belong at the same table. What Peter fails to recognize at Antioch is the Jews can be justified only together with Gentiles.

Now think about this. This means that God's justifying grace may actually offend us, for not only does His grace totally disregard human merit but it also breaks down otherwise acceptable barriers and brings together radically different people. Such solidarity is not always easy to take. Jonah becomes angry at God's grace in sparing the Ninevites; the elder son refuses to join the family celebration when his prodigal brother returns home; the Pharisee thanks God that he is not like the publican. Still, it is God's

way to unite as He justifies and to justify as He unites. The argument in Galatians runs very logically from 2:11-21 to 3:28 where Paul concludes, “There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.”

Now, I want to link together one verse from the passage we have been studying with another verse found later in Galatians. Both texts speak of Christ living in us.

First, 2:20—I have been crucified with Christ; 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.  
Then, 4:19—My little children, for whom I am again in the pain of childbirth *until Christ is formed in you . . .*

In 2:20, Paul speaks of Christ living in the individual Christian. When people look at a Christian, they should see Christ. In 4:19, the “you” is plural. Paul is longing to see Christ formed in the Galatian congregations. Paul wants to see Christ living in His church. He strikes a marvelous balance between the transformation of the individual and the transformation of the community. When people look at a church, they should see Christ. The sign on the front of this building says “Church of Christ.” So, I ask these two questions. When those on the outside look at this group of people do they see a church? Most would probably say “yes.” When those on the outside look at this group of people do they see Christ? I did not ask whether or not they see Christ in any of the individuals of this church. I ask if, when they look at the church as a whole, do they see Christ?

In the October 23, 2000, issue of *U.S. News & World Report*, there was an article entitled, “Divining the God Factor: Are Americans Really Undergoing a Spiritual Revival?” Listen to this assessment of what Americans are yearning for:

Americans are particularly at ease with forms of religious expression that require little in the way of organizational commitment and impose little in the way of group identity.

In other words, Americans are individualistic in their approach to religion. Although there may be a yearning for spirituality, there seems to come with it a resistance to group identity. We prefer to be religious “Lone Rangers.”

I don’t think Paul believed in Lone-Ranger spirituality. For Paul, Christ transforms churches by transforming individual Christians, and Christ transforms individual

Christians in the context of the community of the church. If we think of the church as a body, an image that Paul uses in several of his letters, then what we are saying is that the body is transformed as the members are transformed, and the members are transformed through their attachment to the body. Why should this sound strange? After all, it's simply the approach of holistic medicine. If my doctor cures my aching knee, my whole body benefits. However, it never occurs to me to detach my leg from my body and leave it with my doctor so he can fix the knee. That's absurd! And it is equally absurd to think that Christ can live in you when you choose to detach yourself from His body.

There is a song we sometimes sing, and the first verse goes like this:

Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me,  
All His wonderful passion and purity;  
May His spirit divine  
All my being refine,  
Let the beauty of Jesus be seen in me.

When others look at you, do they see “the beauty of Jesus”? When outsiders look at this church, do they see “the beauty of Jesus”? Look at your own life. Look at the life of this church. Do you see Jesus?

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