

The Heart of Paul's Gospel

Galatians 2:15-21

A. Arguments Paul's opponents in the church likely agreed were valid **15-16**

1. There was a pattern to apologetic letters like this one in Paul's day
 - a. They began with a section that set out basic facts relevant to the argument, as has been done to this point
 - b. They concluded with the most important section that offered arguments designed to establish the case
 - c. In between these was a small section that briefly set out the contested points and refutation of charges
 - d. These verses are that middle section that provides a sketch of the argument in the remainder of the letter
2. Jews have a natural spiritual advantage that sets them above Gentiles
 - a. No doubt Paul believed Jews had a spiritual advantage as recipients of God's covenants and promises
 - b. There's also no doubt he would not have seen Gentiles as sinners in a way he would not have so seen Jews
 - c. His opponents in the church insisted Gentiles needed to follow the Jewish example of obeying the law
 - d. They would have liked the term 'Gentile sinners'; it was a reflection of a growing anti-Gentile sentiment
 - e. It is possible that Paul was baiting a trap, drawing his opponents into believing he thought like they did
 - f. The trap would close when he made it clear Jewishness was not the path to right relationship with God
3. No one is justified before God strictly based on obedience to the Law
 - a. All Judaizing Christians would have agreed that a man is not justified only by observing the law
 - b. Jews of the first century, whether Christian or not, would have had no problem with this statement
 - c. Josephus says after recounting Solomon's prayer it is impossible for men to return thanks to God by works
 - 1) His greatness is such that he stands in need of nothing from man, we can offer him nothing he needs
 - d. Jewish Christians accepted that they were justified by faith, even if having the law was beneficial
4. Coming to God through faith in Christ is necessary for justification
 - a. Like any Gentile believer, the Jewish Christian knew that faith in Jesus was their only hope for salvation
 - b. They knew that neither Jew nor Gentile was going to be justified in God's eyes by their obedience
 - c. Justification came by trusting and committing oneself to Jesus whose righteousness is the ground of ours
5. Agreements were only superficial though when it came to justification
 - a. The Judaizer would have been able to assent to what Paul said to this point, but only in a superficial way
 - b. Neither believed obedience alone was the way to being justified, but they said it was a necessary addition
 - c. Paul though stated in unequivocal fashion that by observing the law no one will be justified
 - d. They said salvation came thru faith *and* obedience, Paul said it came thru faith, *not* obedience
 - e. Jews stood in precisely the same spiritual spot the Gentiles did: faith alone is the way to righteousness
 - f. Jews needed to be like 'Gentile sinners' who knew their only hope lay in faith in Christ's righteousness
 - g. Jesus didn't come to save those who provided their own righteousness, but those who knew they were not
 - h. It is perhaps instructive to note that 'no one' (NIV) is literally 'no flesh' at the end of this verse (AV, HCSB)
 - 1) The root problem is not a lack of law keeping, but our fleshly, sinful nature that cannot be obedient

B. Paul's defense against obedience as having any role in justification **17-21**

1. Sin in Christians is not created or encouraged by 'justified by faith' **17**
 - a. This has been a common attack on this doctrine from the start
 - 1) Paul dealt with this issue again a little later when he wrote to the church at Rome **Rom 5:20-6:1**
 - 2) If good works were not required for salvation, some feared that truth would be used to excuse sin
 - 3) Judaizers offered a simple solution: accept the Jewish lifestyle that offers Mosaic law to guide you
 - a) This way believers would have clear guidance on right and wrong to insure they would be justified
 - b. Faith is the only basis for assurance for obedience is never perfect
 - 1) Paul counters the idea that law was needed to make sure righteousness would be ours with a reminder
 - 2) He argues against the idea that obedience to the law is needed to complete what was begun by faith
 - 3) Jewish Christians in favor of that idea were reminded they had found justification by faith in Christ
 - 4) When seeking justification beyond that moment they trusted Christ as their righteousness, they strayed
 - 5) Continuing to look for a more certain salvation by works they discovered that they still sinned
 - 6) Experience should have taught them that certainty can only be found in faith, not in further works
- c. Obedience leaves us uncertain of salvation; faith does not **20**
 - 1) Living by faith in the Son of God insures that our attitudes and actions will reflect his character
 - 2) Paul mentions two aspects of this faith; it is trusting that he loves us, and that he gave himself for us

- 3) Whatever failures we may experience, we know our Lord's love for us doesn't end; it endures forever
- 4) Whatever sacrifices we may be called on to endure, we know we can't give more than he already has
- 5) We may not be constrained by the law anymore to do what is right, but we are compelled by his love
- d. Only a perversion of 'faith alone' promotes a sinful lifestyle
 - 1) Does the good news that salvation is by faith alone promote the idea that we are free to sin?
 - 2) The history of the church shows that some have taught this, but only by perverting the doctrine
 - 3) We might ask, Does God's creating us as male and female make him responsible for sexual immorality
 - 4) Does his creation of food make him at fault for gluttony? Paul's answer to these is 'Absolutely not'
 - 5) Later in this letter Paul will show the answer to sinful living is not more laws, but living by the Spirit
2. This was more than abstract doctrine for Paul; it was personal **18-19**
 - a. To teach 'faith alone' then later add obedience would be sinful **18**
 - 1) Paul had taught the Galatians that righteousness was to be found in Christ, not in keeping the law
 - 2) Were he to then rebuild the law as the foundation for righteousness he would be proven a lawbreaker
 - 3) To reinstate the law as necessary for salvation would be contrary to what Jesus revealed to him
 - 4) If he taught Christ as the end of the law, and the object to which it pointed and in whom it was fulfilled
 - a) then returned to the law as essential to salvation he would have demeaned the One he called Savior
 - 5) It would have been as though he lured people to Christ under pretense then changed his message
 - b. Devotion to law for justification was proven pointless to him **19**
 - 1) How could he go back and say the law was essential when he had himself died to the law?
 - 2) To die to something is to cease to be subject to or controlled by it; law was no longer his master (2:4)
 - 3) Dying to the law meant his relationship to it was radically changed; it had no authority over him
 - 4) On the road to Damascus he saw how the law's impotence, saw that system as spiritually bankrupt
 - 5) When he saw how his devotion to the law had led him to fight against the Lord, he turned away forever
3. The gospel promotes a Christ centered life that glorifies him **19-21**
 - a. Turning from law as the path to justification wasn't an end in itself
 - 1) Turning from the law as *the* way to righteousness was not the end of his spiritual journey, but the start
 - 2) Casting off that old master was only a prelude to a new kind of life, but still one under a Master
 - 3) Paul did not die to the law so he could live for himself, but so that he could finally live for God
 - 4) He had been so caught up in knowing what law said about God, he had not been free to know God
 - 5) Being free from the law's tyranny opened a whole new way of life by walking in the Spirit **Rom 7:6**
 - 6) This is startling for a former Pharisee for he says he could not live for God until he died to the law
 - b. We can die to the law only if we die to it by faith in Christ **20**
 - 1) Dying to the law was not just a new rule to keep, a new work required before one could be saved
 - 2) We can die to the law only if we by faith identify with Christ in his death, ie, are crucified with Christ
 - 3) The written code with its regulations that condemned us was nailed to the cross; he bore their penalty
 - 4) Being crucified with Christ is not something we're called to do; it describes what's true for each believer
 - c. Dying to the law does not set us free to live for self **20**
 - 1) Freedom from the law is not freedom to sin as the world does; it is freedom from the tyranny of self
 - 2) When we die to the law we no longer live for self, but for the Lord who lives within us
 - 3) This is not 'Let go and let God,' but is giving the One who created us and gave us gifts and talents the ability to direct us so that we can be what he meant us to be, to give our all in service to him
 - 4) Many people are trying to 'find themselves', but the only self worth finding has Christ as its center
 - 5) This new self is impossible to find until our sinful self is crucified with Christ so we die to self
 - d. If justification requires obedience, Christ's death was in vain **21**
 - 1) Paul closes with a bold assertion that he would not turn away from grace alone, no matter what
 - 2) Others wanted to keep grace but add works to ensure justification; he said that was not grace at all
 - 3) The Mosaic law was not wrong in what it demanded, but Jewish history proved it could not be kept
 - 4) The truth was, if law keeping could have led to righteousness, then there was not point to his dying
 - 5) If there was another way to be saved, then Christ's death was not necessary; but it was necessary
 - 6) From the very beginning God in veiled language spoke of the necessity of a Substitute dying for us
 - 7) Our gospel says man's situation is hopeless, but there is hope because he died to give us eternal life