

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT)**

### ***“CONTENDING FOR THE GOSPEL”***

#### **(PART 14)**

#### **GALATIANS 2:17-19**

#### **(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

*17 But if while seeking to be justified in Christ we ourselves have also been found to be sinners, is Christ then one who encourages sin? Absolutely not!*

*18 But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God’s law.*

*19 For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.*

In previous Lessons we have stated that when God justifies a person, or declares him or her to be righteous by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, this does not cause him or her to gravitate towards sin. The grace of God leads to freedom from sin’s slavery to obey God. It does **not** lead to license to disobey him. The principle of grace does **not** endorse lawlessness. On the contrary it promotes genuine holiness.

It is the person who goes back to the Law, or to some other system of rule-keeping, seeking to build up again legalistic decrees done away in Christ, who is the real violator of the Law. Paul emphasizes this in verse **18**. He writes, *“But if I build up again those things I once destroyed, I demonstrate that I am one who breaks God’s law.”*

By preaching the Gospel of grace and salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, Paul had in effect “destroyed” the false Jewish notion that a person could be justified or declared righteous by keeping the Law. For him or anyone else to now return to, or “build up again” that false teaching, for example by acting in a similar manner as Peter, Barnabas and the other Jewish believers, would be to transgress or deviate from the clear truth of the Gospel.

Paul’s argument is to the effect that instead of a person becoming a transgressor by abandoning the Law for grace, he or she becomes a transgressor by **returning** to the Law which he or she had abandoned when he or she believed in Christ alone for his or her salvation.

Peter, by the way he had operated since His interaction with the Gentile centurion Cornelius, had demonstrated that he was persuaded that justification was by faith alone, in Christ alone, and by eating with Gentile believers he had declared that the Mosaic Law was no longer binding upon him as a Jew, nor was it binding upon the Gentiles. He had thus, figuratively, destroyed or torn down the Law as a standard of Christian faith and conduct. Unfortunately, by his subsequent withdrawal from table-fellowship with the Gentiles, he had retracted this declaration, and asserted that the Law was still binding upon believers. He was therefore building up again what he had torn down. By so doing, he was proving himself to be a transgressor.

If Paul allowed Peter, Barnabas and the other Jewish Christians to go back on the Gospel, and thereby on the centrality of faith and the Cross, then he would join them and the Judaizers as the true “lawbreakers” or “transgressors.”

Commenting on verses **17** and **18**, **Warren Wiersbe** writes the following:

“Paul’s argument goes like this: ‘Peter, you and I did not find salvation through the Law, we found it through faith in Christ. But now, after being saved, you go back into the Law! This means that Christ alone did

not save you; otherwise you would not have needed the Law. So, Christ actually made you a sinner! Furthermore, you have preached the Gospel of God's grace to Jews and Gentiles, and have told them they are saved by faith and not by keeping the Law. By going back into legalism, you are building up what you tore down! This means that you sinned by tearing it down to begin with!

In other words, Paul is arguing from Peter's own experience of the grace of God. To go back to Moses is to deny everything that God had done for him and through him."

At the **Jerusalem Conference**, Peter had compared the Mosaic Law to a burdensome yoke (**Acts 15:10**). Now he had put himself back under that same yoke!

The Reformed theologian **Phil Newton** makes the following insightful observation:

"The most miserable person in the world is that one who has understood the grace of God in Christ, embraced Jesus Christ by faith, then along the course has begun to question if Jesus Christ is really sufficient for his justification before God. He inches back toward '**doing, doing, doing**' as a means of satisfying the demands of God. He becomes a legalist inwardly and often, outwardly, by his persistence on following certain principles and practices to gain a little more merit with God. Paul's whole message to the Galatians is that Jesus Christ is sufficient for your justification and He is sufficient alone, without any addition on your part."

In verse **19** Paul writes, "*For through the law I died to the law so that I may live to God.*"

**John Piper** states that,

"Verse 19 gives additional support for verse 18...Paul says, 'For I through the law died to the law, that I might live to God.' If you must die to the law in order to live to God, then clearly it is a transgression to try to build the law again. That's the connection between verses 18 and 19. Verse 19 makes the amazing point that as long as you are trying to earn your way to God by works of law, you cannot have a close relation to God. The closer you try to get to God by works, the farther you drive him from you. There are two possibilities in religion: you can think of your **ability**, God's demand, and the ladder of law; or you can think of your **inability**, God's demand, and the free gift of justification by faith. Paul had learned through his own long experience with the law that in order to live in close communion with God and have his power, he had to simply give up on legalism and die. The old self that loves to boast in its ability to climb ladders must die."

In verse 19, Paul deals with the problem of the "I" and the desire to control **MY** own salvation, either by keeping the Law (in the case of these Jewish Christians), or by being a morally upright person (as is the case with the majority of us). He informs us that the Law, and any other system of rule-keeping, must be definitely abandoned as a means of justification.

Paul does **not** say in verse 19 that the **Law** is dead, but that **he** was now dead to the Law. He had come to understand that the Law could not justify him, but in fact condemned him. The Law demanded death for sin and gave no hope of ever attaining perfect righteousness, which was and still is, the only type of righteousness that the thrice Holy God accepts! But thanks be to God, what He **demand**s, He also graciously **provides** in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ! Believers are no longer in bondage to the Law because they have died it, and no slave-master can give orders to a dead slave!

In addition, since we are dead to the Law, then it is impossible for the Law to be the way that we are made right with God and preserved in a state of righteousness.

Practically speaking, to die to the Law is to renounce it and to be freed from its dominion, so that we have no confidence in it and it does not hold us captive under its yoke of slavery. As far as the Law is concerned, I am dead; I don't even exist any longer. The Law no longer even recognizes my existence!

Let me repeat. Paul does **not** say, "The Law is dead." The Law is very much alive. It still condemns the sinner, it still is a ministration that produces death, according to **2 Corinthians 3:7**. The Law still demands the death of the sinner. But Paul is informing his readers that it has no power over believers anymore. We are beyond its reach forever, "*For through the law I died to the law.*" This is true of every believer.

In **Romans 6:14** Paul writes, "*For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.*" (**King James Version**). In his commentary on **Romans**, **William Newell** wrote the following concerning this verse:

"Note the two "fors." The first "for" announces the Divine decree that sin's lordship over us shall be ended. The second reveals the happy condition of things in which such a release is possible: we are not under the **legal** principle,—which **first** demanded **duty**, and **then** offered **blessing**; but we are under the **grace** principle,—which confers **blessing first**, and, behold, **fruits follow!**

It is deeply significant here that even to us, new creatures in Christ, and recipients of the Holy Spirit, it is definitely announced to us that we are **not under law**,—else bondage and helplessness would still be our lot. Note, God does not say we are not under **the** Law,—the Mosaic Law: (Gentiles never were!) But, God says we are not under law,—under the legal **principle**. In the opening part of Chapter Seven, Paul will show the Jewish believers, (who had been under law), that only death could release them from their legal obligation; and that they had been made dead to the Law, through being identified with Christ in His death.

Only when we believe that our history in Adam, with all its responsibilities and demands to produce righteousness, ended at the cross, shall we find ourselves completely free to enjoy these words of heavenly comfort—**UNDER GRACE!**"

In **Romans 7:4-6** we read:

*4 So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, so that you could be joined to another, to the one who was raised from the dead, to bear fruit to God.*

*5 For when we were in the flesh, the sinful desires, aroused by the law, were active in the members of our body to bear fruit for death.*

*6 But now we have been released from the law, because we have died to what controlled us, so that we may serve in the new life of the Spirit and not under the old written code.*

**(New English Translation)**

**Kenneth Wuest** explains that when Paul says that he has died to the Law he means that he has ceased to have any relation to it, so that it has no further claim upon or control over him. It is law as conceived of as a body of **legalistic statutes**, that he has died to. He uses the Greek personal pronoun **ego**, **"I,"** which indicates that he is speaking of his own personal experience. His attempt to fulfil the requirements of the Mosaic legislation as a means of salvation, had taught him his own inability to meet its demands, and its inability to make him righteous. He therefore finally abandoned it as a means of justification, and accepted salvation in Christ.

He discovered that what the Law actually did was to reveal sin, to provoke sin, in a certain sense, to create sin, for where there was no law, sin was not reckoned (**Romans 4:15**). He found that it provided no remedy for sin, but rather condemned him hopelessly, for no one can fulfil its requirements. It exercised a double power over him, for it made him a sinner and it punished him for being one!

Faith in Christ was the means whereby the Law's strangle-hold over Paul was completely broken. The Lord Jesus Christ lived under the Law; He fully obeyed the Law; He assumed the guilt and penalty which the human race incurred by having violated the Law, and in dying under the Law He satisfied its requirements. He therefore passed out of the realm where the Law in its legalistic aspect had any control over Him.

Every genuine believer has been identified with Christ in His death and also in His resurrection, and thus has passed out of the realm of divine Law so far as its legalistic aspect is concerned.

It is in this sense that Paul says that he has died to the Law that he might live unto God. His efforts to subject himself to the Law as a means of acceptance with God, in reality had the effect of preventing him from living a life of unreserved devotion to God. Legalism invariably inserts itself between the soul of an individual and God. This is perhaps its most subtle and dangerous characteristic.

When a person is convicted of a capital offence and is executed, the law has no further claim on him or her. So it is with the believer who has died in Christ and rises to new life in Him, for the Law's demand of death was satisfied in the death of Christ. The justice of God has been fully satisfied and he or she is forever free from any further penalty.

The sinner who takes the Lord Jesus Christ as his or her saviour, passes from the condemnation of the law into the glorious liberty that is in Christ, and **Romans 8:1** and **2** becomes immediately and permanently relevant to him or her:

*1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.*

*2 For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.*

**(New English Translation)**

If we are joined to Christ by faith in His finished work on Calvary, we share in His fulfillment of the righteous demands of the law. The Law slew Him and it also slew us in a sense, for we were in Him when He went to the Cross, and we therefore died in Him. We are therefore no longer subject to the Law, for in Him, we have died to it!

Paul says, *“I died to the law so that I may live to God.”* Here Paul refers to the transformation that occurs in the life of a saved individual. He is not referring to **living** like every human being alive on earth lives, but of living on a higher plane, understanding that this temporal life is the first phrase of our eternal life with God. Our Lord speaks of this in **John 10:10**: *“The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come so that they may have life, and may have it abundantly”* (**New English Translation**).

God is life and to really live, one must to live to God and for God, and it is only those who are in Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, who can truly live and enjoy this life as God meant it to be enjoyed, because It is Christ Himself who is their life, according to **Colossians 3:4**!

It is very important for us to note that Paul did not say that he died to the law so that he might live to **sin**, or even to **self**, which would amount to the same thing. He says, *“I died to the law so that I may live to **God**.”* The purpose of grace is not to give believers freedom **to** sin, but rather to give them freedom **from** sin! If a person claims to be a believer and lives for anything other than God, he or she is not living a Christian life at all.

In **Isaiah 43:5-7**, Yahweh makes the following declaration:

*5 Don't be afraid, for I am with you. From the east I will bring your descendants; from the west I will gather you.*

*6 I will say to the north, 'Hand them over!' and to the south, 'Don't hold any back!' Bring my sons from distant lands, and my daughters from the remote regions of the earth,*



*7 everyone who belongs to me, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed—yes, whom I made.*

**(New English Translation)**

In this passage, Yahweh identifies those to whom He refers as “*my sons...who [belong] to me...whom I created for my glory.*” Brothers and sisters, we are God’s sons; we belong to Him; we were created for His glory. The purpose of our lives then is “*to live to God.*” It is in living to Him that we glorify Him! If we do that we will have accomplished God’s purpose for our life and we will reap the rewards in the life to come.