

and this forms the last part of the verse; 'because no one can be justified merely by keeping the law'. I believe it is best translated by placing it in parenthesis.

At the heart of all this is Paul's jealous guarding of the Gospel! For him, the Gospel was not a religious system with rules and regulations; it was the way of being put right with God, of 'justification'. Moreover, it was the only means of justification because it was to be found through Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and through faith in Him alone. This was the Gospel, and everything else which Christians and Jews did was from his point of view, nothing more than forms of religion.

### Application

Frankly, the common acceptance that Christians worship God in their separate churches and are happy to live as if all other churches did not exist or were not relevant, is a scandal of immense proportions by which many come under the judgement of God. Christ is not separated, and where we separate Him, we affront the Gospel, the one Gospel which all Christians share, the Gospel by which we are all justified. You may feel that the Christian church has developed with different theological emphases and practices which make them all a valid part of the one 'body of Christ', but I have always felt that the Apostle Paul or the Apostle Peter, would look at our church structure today, including the vast number of independent churches which have attempted to 'get things right' because other churches have failed, and they would be horrified at our divisions. I also believe that Jesus feels rent apart by our divisions; and yes, I do mean that. I do not believe that all Christian people have to develop their theology and practices along the same lines, but as far as I can see from Scripture, there is one Gospel of Salvation, and this is through Jesus, and celebrated by a meal which we can and should all share. I frankly do not regard as 'Christian theology' any argument which cuts up the body of Christ, and I urge you to believe the same.

The reason why I have said this (and those who have read my work elsewhere will recognise this as one of my deeply held beliefs about the Bible and the Gospel), is because this is as close as I can get to taking my own stance with Paul against the corruption of the Gospel. If you feel this is presumptuous, then please tell me what kind of church or Christian theology can consistently defend the way in which some churches refuse to administer the sacrament of communion to Christians of other churches! Your only answer will be, those churches which think they have the truth alone and others do not have it! I am sorry, but nothing can persuade me that such arguments are right.

Paul jealously guarded the Gospel as God's open invitation to have faith in His son in order to be saved and be at peace with Him. May we guard it as well; and may we yield to it and live in fellowship with all who do, whatever their 'church' background.

### Questions (for use in groups)

1. Are there people in the church, or committees of it, which we tend to accept without question? Why is this so, and should we question them or it?
2. Should Paul have shown Peter respect, and if so, how? Is it always right to challenge someone openly?
3. Discuss verse 16. Does it contain an adequate summary of the Gospel of Salvation?

### Discipleship

Take some time to write a list of all the different Christian churches of which you know, and write down some of the divisions which exist between them. Using the internet, find out the contacts for some of the major church leaders and organisations, and if you feel so motivated by this study, write to them and ask them why Christ has been divided between them, and why they present a divided Christ to the world. You may find a different way of expressing this, but you can still pursue a similar call for the unity of the Gospel!

### Final Prayer

Lord God Almighty, give us hearts which yearn to understand and know Your Word. May we look forward to reading it, be prepared to study it where necessary, and use it and remember it in our daily lives. By so doing, may we give glory to You, God Almighty. Thank You Lord: AMEN

### Prayer

Praise You, Lord Jesus Christ, for we can never tell when You will burst into our lives and help us; giving us Your Spirit, healing our bodies, opening our eyes, encouraging us when we are weak, or giving us the strength to move on. Thank You, Lord Jesus, for the way You surprise us and lead us on in the path of faith and life. Alleluia! AMEN

### Other Prayer Suggestions

#### Weekly Theme: Personal troubles

Give thanks today for everything the Lord is doing right now, to help you through personal troubles and difficulties. The mere fact that you spend time giving the Lord thanks like this is a great way to show the Lord that you trust Him and are prepared to do what He says in order to resolve difficulties. Ask the Lord to give you strength to face the troubles which you face today.

### Meditation

May we master our emotions by the power of the Spirit;  
For the good of the fellowship of God's people, the Church.

May our anger be reserved for all that is unjust;  
Not vented on our loved ones or even ourselves.

May our enthusiasm be directed according to Your will;  
Not merely let loose on the bandwagons we join.

May our love inform each and every decision we make;  
Not squandered upon our personal wants and pleasures.

May our sensitivity be used to discern right and wrong;  
Not used to make ungodly judgements about others.

May our sorrows be the seedbed of learning in Christ;  
Not made into any reason for a fruitless lack of faith.

May our joy always be shared with others around us;  
And the blessings of Christ be made available to all!

### Bible Study - Galatians 2:11-16

<sup>11</sup> When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him face to face because he was clearly in the wrong. <sup>12</sup> Before some men came from James, he used to eat with Gentiles; but after they arrived, he began to draw back and separated himself for fear of those who backed circumcision. <sup>13</sup> The rest of the Jews joined with him in his hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away with it. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that what they did was not helping to advance the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, 'If you, being a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like the Jews?'

<sup>15</sup> We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles, <sup>16</sup> now know that someone is not justified by keeping the law but by faith in Jesus; so we have now placed our faith in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by our faith in Him, and not by keeping the law (because no one can be justified merely by keeping the law).

### Review

You may find it hard to read this passage because it is very easy to become confused about what Paul is saying about what and to whom. Clearly, Paul was writing about something which happened when Peter visited Antioch (2:11), and it made Paul confront Peter and Barnabas (2:11-13). Paul spoke forthrightly to Peter, and it appears to have been a highly significant confrontation which raised some high emotions! Indeed, in the last verse, Paul repeated himself, mentioning the law, justification and faith in Christ Jesus several times (2:16). As he wrote about this to the Galatians many years later, he still appears to have felt very deeply about what happened.

Reading the passage carefully, the following picture emerges. Peter went to Antioch at some point when Paul and Barnabas were in leadership there, and before the two of them began missionary work (Acts 11:25f.). Peter was a leader of the church at Jerusalem and had been involved in the spreading of the Gospel to Gentiles after a famous incident recorded in Acts 10 and 11. The risen Jesus had challenged Peter to eat 'unclean foods' with a Gentile named Cornelius, and after Peter accepted this challenge, he advocated the cause of Gentile Christians in the church (Acts 11:1-18). This was important because Jews traditionally would not eat the same meal as Gentiles, so the common sharing of food was a significant sign of true fellowship within the early church. Though they believed in Jesus, some Jews found this all too much, and they were called 'Judaisers'; their aim was to try and preserve the Jewish Law within the Christian Church.

What seems to have happened when Peter went to Antioch was that at first, Peter shared all his meals with all the Christians in Antioch. Some time after his visit began, some visitors arrived from Jerusalem who were 'Judaisers', and in order not to upset their feelings, Peter elected to eat with them alone, in the traditional Jewish way (2:12). Barnabas also felt that he had to go along with his honoured guest (2:13), but what Peter and Barnabas did broke the precious 'common' table of fellowship, and Paul was clearly furious. He challenged Peter directly by pointing out to him the hypocrisy of his actions (2:14). He went on to speak strongly about what it meant to be justified by faith in Christ Jesus alone and not by keeping the law, repeating himself for emphasis (2:16)!

Paul wrote about this to the Galatians for two reasons. Firstly, he demonstrated that he was able and willing to confront Peter, the foremost Apostle of Jesus Christ, because he had done something very wrong. Paul wanted to make it clear that although he submitted his 'Gospel' to Peter and the other Apostles (2:9) to ensure that his preaching of the Gospel was no different to theirs, he would not hesitate to stand up to Peter and point out when he had done something wrong. Secondly, what had caused the problems when Paul had to confront Peter was the influence of 'Judaisers' within the church. Now that Judaisers were also responsible for creating difficulties for the Galatian church, no one could be under any illusions about what Paul would do. He would confront the situation head on!

For Paul, the problem was that Jewish Christians who felt that Gentiles should be circumcised were not merely Christians 'with a different view point'. What they believed struck at the heart of the Gospel, because it kept two classes of people apart within the church; Jews and Gentiles; and the implication was that if you added Jewish legalism to salvation through Jesus Christ, this somehow made you a better Christian. Paul would have none of it. Salvation and justification was through Christ alone, and nothing else; even the laws of Moses. Paul's stance was essential so that the Gospel heritage could be kept pure, and Christ centred, as it is for us to this day.

### **Going Deeper**

This passage forms an essential transition in Galatians between Paul's discussion of his experience and credentials as an Apostle, and the key issue which he was writing about to the Galatian churches, which was the devastating impact on the church of the teaching of people who required adherence to circumcision and the laws of Moses for all Christians. This may seem to be something we can gloss over quickly, but it is a serious matter, because although people do not try and add circumcision to the Gospel today, they do try and add other things. We need to know the detailed arguments about how and why we should keep the Gospel pure.

#### ***The incident at Antioch***

Any of us would love to have been a fly on the wall when Paul challenged Peter at Antioch! But we must not get carried away with Paul's powerful and proper 'put down' of Peter; this is an example of what should happen when God's people have a disagreement and need to resolve their differences! The matter was dealt with immediately and in the open. In some churches today we have built an ethos around some leaders which makes it virtually impossible for them to be confronted with their own mistakes. We should not distinguish between them, they could be telly-evangelists or bishops, local priests or lay preachers, for example. But no one is above correction about matters which lie at the heart of the Gospel, and no one should think themselves above correction. Here, Paul, a junior leader of a less well known but successful church, faced down the man at the head of the church; someone who had known Jesus personally and had

heard Jesus say to him 'who do you say I am?' and had answered 'You are the Messiah!' Surely no-one could question Peter's judgement? But Paul did question Peter, and rightly so.

The fact was that Peter was wrong, and this was not the first time in his life that this was so! Peter had to accept the challenge of Paul in front of everyone at Antioch, and doubtless, the discussions went on long after the charge of hypocrisy (2:13) Paul levelled at Peter. Paul argued that because Peter had already made a choice to accept the fellowship of Gentile Christians, his collusion with the 'Judaisers' when they were present was two-faced; moreover, by siding with them at the meal table he implied that he accepted their demand which was that all Christians be circumcised! Peter's position was untenable and Paul's charge irrefutable.

#### ***Breaking the fellowship of the table***

There is one other aspect of this situation which is worth bearing in mind. What Peter had done had broken the fellowship of the table at Antioch and divided Christian from Christian. In the early church, meals were shared not just as an expression of common fellowship (see Acts 2:46, 4:32f.), but as part of what we call 'communion'. The common meal was the normal setting for the 'breaking of bread' by which the church remembered Jesus' death and resurrection, according to Jesus' own request (see Mark 14:22f. etc.). This is what happened in the church at Corinth, for example (1 Cor. 11), and was the general practice for the early church. So behind the charge Paul brought against Peter lay his horror that the 'body of Christ' should be divided by the scruples led by requirements of Jewish law.

Here in Galatians, we hear about this incident from Paul's point of view, of course, so we do not know how Peter responded, but we can be fairly sure that Paul won the argument. Certainly, by the time of the great 'Council of Jerusalem' called after Paul and Barnabas had begun missionary work (see Acts 15), both Peter and James totally accepted the argument that Gentile Christians were fully accepted into the church without any addition to the Gospel of salvation through Jesus Christ alone (Acts 15:28,29). The Judaisers had lost, and circumcision was ruled out. It did not stop those Jews who believed in it from touting their opinions around the churches of Galatia and creating havoc, however!

#### ***The theology of salvation through Christ alone***

The Greek of Paul's letter to the Galatians is unclear at the point where verse 14 moves into verse 15. The problem is that Paul writes at the beginning of verse 15 'we who are Jews by birth ...' sounding as if he is still writing about what he remembered saying to Peter; the 'we' being Paul and Peter, face to face! Some versions of the Bible follow this idea and include verses 15 and 16 as part of what Paul said to Peter. Alternatively, Paul could have been speaking about himself and other Jews like him in verse 15, and for this reason, other versions of the Bible have a paragraph break at this point and continue from verse 15 as if Paul is simply continuing his letter and speaking generally to the Galatians about salvation.

It seems to me that Paul wrote these words both recollecting what he had said to Peter, but with the Galatians in mind. What had happened was a serious and defining moment in Paul's life and the life of the early church, and what was said would have stood out in his own memory. Certainly, we will discover later on in Galatians 3 why Paul has written so extensively about this incident and what it means theologically.

In verses 15 and 16, we can easily become confused because Paul writes one of those sentences which we can read several times over before spotting why it is written as it is! It mentions being 'justified' (using one or other form of the word) three times, 'faith in Jesus' twice, and 'keeping the law' (or 'not keeping the law') three times, and all in one sentence!

The sentence flows like this. Paul says that a true Jew who has learned the truth about Jesus knows that 'someone is not justified by keeping the law but by faith in Jesus'. In this sentence, to be justified means to be put right with God, and Jesus made this justification possible by His death and resurrection, so we need to have faith in Him in order to obtain it. This much is straightforward and is the heart of the Gospel as preached by Paul or Peter. Paul then goes on to say that having come to know this truth, a person must act upon what they know; so he says 'so we have now placed our faith in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by our faith in Him, and not by keeping the law'. This second clause restates the Gospel not as something merely known, but as something believed in and done, and it is only when we see this that the whole sentence begins to make sense. This was Paul's frank way of saying to Peter that he had to both believe the Gospel and put it into practice! Lastly, Paul added an addendum to emphasise the irrelevance of the law,