



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

Are You Setting Aside God's Grace?

GALATIANS 2.11-21

1/30/13

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“Dance with the one who brung ya,” says the old adage. This saying advises against abandoning whomever or whatever it is that allowed you to attain or arrive once you have done so. “Don’t set aside the very thing that got you there,” would be another way of saying it. Human nature somehow tends toward the mistake warned against in this truism.

In this passage we are warned against setting aside the very thing that brought us into right standing with God. God’s grace, revealed in the person and work of Christ, must not be set aside. How could anyone receive the grace of God and then return to the works of the law? Especially knowing that the law brought only condemnation and was the reason God’s grace was necessary in the first place. Good question!

Galatians 2.11-21: Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles, but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, “If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”

We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. “But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which 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 set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through law, then Christ died in vain.”

CONDEMN HYPOCRICY (11-14)

The word hypocrite originally referred to an actor playing a part on the stage. Here Paul uses the word to condemn Peter for acting like he didn’t approve of a Jew eating with Gentiles when certain men from Jerusalem were present, when he commonly did so before they arrived. Peter’s dealings with Cornelius, a Gentile, make his withdrawal from table fellowship with the Gentile believers even more notorious (see Acts 10).

Peter’s withdrawal from sharing meals with Gentiles is not motivated by any change in his religious convictions. He is responding purely out of fear. He fears the visitors from Jerusalem who have come to compel Gentile believers to be circumcised and submit themselves to the works of the law. It is unlikely that these visitors come on the authority of James and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. However, it is likely that they act as though they do. The proverbs teach us that “the fear of man brings a snare,” and Peter has clearly been ensnared in the situation Paul recounts here.

“BUT WHEN I SAW THAT THEY WERE NOT STRAIGHTFORWARD ABOUT THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL...”

The consequences of Peter’s hypocrisy are far reaching as the rest of the Jews at Antioch are swept up in it. Even Barnabas, a leader in the church, is caught up in their pretense. Paul’s reaction to all this is intense to say the least. The confusion stirred by Peter’s actions draw a public condemnation from Paul. Paul withstood Peter to his face and in the presence of the other believers. We should understand his question posed to Peter to be a summation of this confrontation, rather than a word-for-word account.

Peter’s hypocrisy was confusing the entire church about the relationship between Jew and Gentile believers. Even worse, it confused the issue of grace and works. Paul’s question to Peter is this, “if you have set aside law-keeping as a means to right standing with God, why would you do things that would compel Gentiles to think that they should take up law-keeping as a means to right

BIBLE STUDIES

LEGISLATORS ONLY: WEDNESDAY LUNCH AT THE AUSTIN CLUB (11:30AM OR UPON ADJOURNMENT, WHICHEVER IS EARLIER)

CAPITOL COMMUNITY STUDY: FRIDAY BREAKFAST @ 8AM IN MEMBERS’ LOUNGE (E2.1002)

Texas

Are You Setting Aside God's Grace?

standing with God?" In the following seven verses, Paul clarifies this confusion for the Galatian church, as well as for you and me.

Are you willing to condemn hypocrisy wherever you may find it in your actions and attitudes?

CORRECT HERESY (15-21)

Paul now expands upon the premise of his question to Peter before the church at Antioch. Even those who are Jews according to the natural order, or by birth, know that justification comes, not through the law, but through faith in Christ. Even the Jew, who by virtue of ethnicity was counted among God's covenant people, found the law lacking in ability to justify. Instead it only brought condemnation before God. Therefore the Jew finds that, like the Gentile, he is a sinner and in need of forgiveness. Faith in Christ brings that forgiveness, justification before God and produces true righteousness, not law-keeping.

If even the Jew has forsaken law-keeping as a means of righteousness and justification, what is a Gentile to do? Would the Jewish believer compel the Gentile who has turned to Christ in faith for justification to then go on to a life of law-keeping? Law-keeping can never justify anyone, Jew or Gentile. Faith alone, in Christ alone, by Grace alone can justify the sinner before God.

“...EVEN WE HAVE BELIEVED IN CHRIST JESUS, THAT WE MIGHT BE JUSTIFIED BY FAITH IN CHRIST AND NOT BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW, FOR BY THE WORKS OF THE LAW NO FLESH SHALL BE JUSTIFIED.”

Having turned to Christ in faith, one can never turn back to a life of law-keeping. To do so would be to build again the very thing our faith served to destroy, a legal structure whose purpose was to establish our justification before God, yet completely failed to do so. Paul makes it clear that a believer's life has been severed from any relationship to the law—we have died to it that we might live to God.

A believer has been united with Christ in His crucifixion where the penalty of all transgression of the law was served. As Christ was resurrected, so the believer is united with Him by faith and is raised to newness of life. Christ now lives His life through the surrendered life of the believer.

Paul closes his argument with this personal admonition. “I do not set aside the grace of God.” This statement carries the implication that this is precisely what those to whom he writes were doing—especially those who would compel the Gentile believers to place themselves under Mosaic law. “If righteousness comes through the law,” Paul argues, “then Christ died in vain.” If we can justify ourselves through law-keeping, then Christ offered His life up for nothing.

If you are a believer, you trusted in the person and work of Christ for justification because you knew that under the law you stood condemned. What sense does it make for you to return to a life of law-keeping to maintain your standing before God or enhance it? We cannot return to the law. We must continue in grace!

CONCLUSION

Are you dancing with the one who brought ya? Or are you setting aside the grace of God and striving to justify yourself through the works of the law?

Do your actions and attitudes confuse others about the nature of your relationship to God? Do they commend others to the grace of God or the works of the law?

Do you have a teachable spirit? Are you open to those who confront false ideas you hold about the basis of your relationship to God? Are you willing to confront those who espouse false ideas about God's grace?...those who are not straightforward about the truth of the gospel?