

# Galatians 2:15-17

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gal/gal-2/galatians-215-17/>

*Paul continues his public rebuke, and reminds Peter of the truth of the Gospel. Obeying the law does not justify anyone before God. Only faith in Jesus justifies us before God. If anyone calls us sinners because we no longer obey the law, that does not mean we are sinning.*

Paul continues his speech rebuking Peter's hypocrisy in rejecting Gentiles and associating with law-preaching competing Jewish "authorities." The speech rebuking Peter continues until the end of chapter 2. In this passage, Paul criticizes Peter and rejects the doctrine of following the law, while defending faith alone in Christ. He declares that both he and Peter *are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles*, meaning ethnically they are both Jewish, not pagan Gentiles. The Gentile believers are seen as sinners in Jewish social circles, because they are uncircumcised and don't follow the Old Testament law.

But, Paul claims, he and Peter both know that *a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Christ Jesus*. Again, Paul expresses that he and Peter, both Jews, both *have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law*. They believed in Christ Jesus because that is the only way to become justified before God, *since by the works of the law no flesh will be justified*.

Justification in the sight of God simply does not involve our deeds in any way. Works do not justify us before God. No one, except Jesus, can stand before God without sin. Religious rituals do not justify us before God. Nobody, no matter what they do, can become justified (saved from Hell to Heaven) before God through works.

It is only faith in Jesus Christ that justifies us. Paul had to remind Peter of this, because Peter was acting in such a way as to communicate that Jewish customs and Jewish laws *must* be obeyed. By treating the Gentile believers as unclean sinners by refusing to interact with them while eating, Peter is sending a message that they need to be circumcised to keep from being excluded. This behavior conflicts with the ethnic unity in Christ (3:28), the freedom in Christ (5:1), and the truth of the gospel (v. 14).

*But if, Paul says, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!* Is it a good or bad thing to be *seeking to be justified* before God? For most of us, our immediate reaction is "A good thing." And that is true, if we are an unbeliever who has not been justified before God. But is it a good thing to seek to be justified before God if we are already a believer in Jesus? Or, said another way, does it make sense to seek to be justified before God if we are already justified before God?

If believers seek to be justified before God, they are saying Jesus' death wasn't enough; we have to add something in order to be justified. So, for a believer in Jesus, seeking to be justified is actually very counterproductive. It is an overt act of disbelief, an act that says we need to add to Jesus' work on the cross by our own actions.

And of course when we attempt to add to Jesus' work on the cross, we will fail, and be found a sinner. So does that mean Jesus failed and is now a *minister of sin*? Not at all. As Paul will explain in the next passage, what it means is that we put ourselves under bondage to sin again, by establishing rules to follow, which always leads to failure. There is only one way to be justified before God, and that is through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Once we have received that gift, there is nothing left to "seek" in terms of being justified in the sight of God. Being justified in the sight of God means being declared innocent, guiltless of all sins—past, present, and future. There is nothing to add.

### **Biblical Text**

**<sup>15</sup> "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;<sup>16</sup> nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. <sup>17</sup> But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!**