

Justified by Faith in Christ

Key Verse:
“Through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
—Galatians 2:19, 20, New Revised Standard Version

Selected Scripture:
Galatians 2:15-21

ONE MAJOR ISSUE THAT affected the early Christians was whether Gentile converts would be received into full fellowship with their Jewish brethren without being circumcised. The church at Jerusalem debated this matter, but the apostles agreed that circumcision was not essential for salvation, even though false brethren had attempted to teach otherwise.—Gal. 2:2-4

Although Paul was not associated with the other apostles prior to Jesus' crucifixion, they recognized he now had been especially commissioned to bring the Gospel message to the Gentiles. “Contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) And when James, Cephas,

and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.”—vss. 7-9

Paul also recounts an occasion when it was necessary for him to rebuke Peter, who was probably considered by many Jewish Christians as the chief apostle. When Peter first came to Antioch, he freely ate with Christian converts. Subsequently, a group of Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem for a visit. Not wishing to be seen eating with these new brethren, Peter and Barnabas withdrew from their fellowship. Peter well knew, in connection with the conversion of Cornelius, that God was not a respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), and therefore, he erred by refusing to eat with uncircumcised believers, implying that the Mosaic law afforded a higher level of sanctification than the righteousness of faith. Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy by pointing out that Jewish Christians had a new standing on the basis of faith in the redemptive sacrifice of Christ, and that they were dead to the Law. Accordingly, since the Law could not justify anyone, Gentiles should not be placed under it.—Gal. 2:11-18

In our Key Verse, Paul acknowledges his inability to keep the Law, but being identified with Christ, and trusting to his righteousness as the basis for salvation, he, and all true believers who have accepted the doing of God’s will as their chief goal, will lead a life of holiness and be reckoned as being crucified with Christ.

God’s measureless grace to consecrated believers who have received the Holy Spirit should be dearly treasured. Had it been possible for any of us to earn salvation through any works of our own, there would have been no need for Christ to have been crucified. “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”—vs. 21 ■