



Notes for Adult discussion groups at  
On-Line@9 Worship Service  
17 June 2007

## FAITH LIFT

### Galatians 2:15-21

Indeed, we are Jews by birth and not “Gentile sinners,” as they are called. **Yet we know that a person is put right with God only through faith in Jesus Christ, never by doing what the Law requires.** We, too, have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be put right with God through our faith in Christ, and not by doing what the Law requires. For no one is put right with God by doing what the Law requires. If, then, as we try to be put right with God by our union with Christ, we are found to be sinners as much as the Gentiles are - does this mean that Christ is serving the cause of sin? By no means! If I start to rebuild the system of Law that I tore down, then I show myself to be someone who breaks the Law. So far as the Law is concerned, however, I am dead - killed by the Law itself - in order that I might live for God.

**I have been put to death with Christ on his cross, so that it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me.** This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me. I refuse to reject the grace of God. But if a person is put right with God through the Law, it means that Christ died for nothing!

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### Faith Lift

- 1 Why can't we be saved by the law? Paul has emphasised that his life as a Pharisee was not sufficient to justify him with God. Look at Romans 3:21-23. If we can become righteous by living according to the law, then Christ's death was in vain. We could add that attempting to achieve righteousness in this way is insulting to Christ, as his action in allowing himself to die for us was meaningless.
- 2 What does Paul mean by “I have been crucified with Christ”? Christ died a shameful death and now Paul is boasting that he shares in this. Paul is talking about being “justified” or made right with God because of Christ's death. He is saying that his old self has been put to death. There is also the sense that a person who becomes identified with Christ has decided to live within the new historical reality created by the events of the cross of Christ and his resurrection.

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- 3 When might those who have received God's grace find themselves guilty of setting “aside the grace of God”? This refers to the Jewish Christians in Antioch who had insisted on gentile Christians being circumcised.
- 4 Are there any areas of our life where we are in danger of doing the same? The gospel (good news) message set out in this passage is straightforward. Are there any things that we expect people to do that are additional to the basic simplicity of the gospel? Look at Romans 6:23.

### Background

In the church at Antioch, both Peter and Paul shared meals with Gentile believers. Yet when visitors arrive from Jerusalem, Peter and the other Jewish Christians cease to do so (v11-13). We do not know whether those from Jerusalem and/or Peter considered Law observance necessary for Gentile salvation, or whether their concern was that table fellowship with Gentiles risked compromising the Jewish believers' fidelity to the Law. Paul, however, believed that the truth about salvation should determine the practice of the Church. He can be certain that his fellow believers agree that keeping the Law alone cannot save and that faith in Christ is needed, but Paul goes further and understands Law observance and Christ's death as alternatives. The Law is part of the problem, not the solution. This is not because the Law is bad, but because human inability to obey the Law makes Christ's death necessary. To suggest that Law observance has any role in salvation is to deny that Christ's death was necessary and to render it pointless (v21). It is Christ's death alone that saves both Jews and Gentiles. Paul believes that any imposition of Jewish practices upon Gentile believers implies the opposite and is inconsistent with this fundamental truth. What lay behind the opposition Paul experienced? Is Law observance insisted on because it was thought to please God and so contribute to salvation, or in order to maintain the boundary between Jew and Gentile? Whichever was the primary element in the dispute at Antioch, Paul would certainly have rejected both as inconsistent with the grace of God. Paul uses the word 'justification' to describe the way in which believers are made right with God. There is much debate today about what Paul means by 'justification'. The traditional view that it is a legal image still seems strongest. A person declared innocent in a court of law is justified, and so because of Christ's death those who believe are found innocent in God's judgement. Yet it is possible to push images too far and take them too literally. Paul is not describing a legal fiction in which God pretends that we are innocent. We are justified in Christ (v17) with the result that he now lives in us (v20). Transformation comes through union with him! Whether Paul speaks of our faith in Christ or of Christ's faithfulness (v15 & 20), it is the death of the self in crucifixion with Christ (v19) that leads to new life.

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