

Dead to Law, Alive for God – 4-11-10

Galatians 2:14-21

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

"But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. (TNIV)

The coming of Christ effectively meant an end to the observance of law. Christ has done something that means we can not rebuild again what God has dismantled. Put another way we cannot allow men to bring in through the back door what Christ has slammed shut on the front. Christ has brought an end to law observance. How does that happen?

19 "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."

Through Christ's death and resurrection Paul and everyone else in Christ have also died to the law. What was destroyed cannot be rebuilt because a death has occurred. In other words, those who have died with Christ are no longer alive to the law. We are now alive to another authority.

20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

Many Christians know this verse and yet quote it out of context. People tend to hold up this verse as a kind of measuring stick of progress in spiritual life. "The more I die to myself the more I'm alive to Christ and the better Christian I am." But spiritual growth is not the context of verse 20. What is the context? It's an explanation of verse 19.

19 "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."

The context is I am dead to the law so that I can be alive for God. How does that happen? Verse 20 is the explanation. How is it that Paul or any other Christian has died to the law so that we can live for God?

20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

Paul, the transformed legalist, here quotes himself speaking to Peter. He's describing his own experience of how he died to the law so that he could live a new life, Christ's life in him.

How is it that we *have been* (past tense) crucified with Christ?

Paul gives a more full explanation in Romans 6.

Romans 6:1-4

What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We are those who have died to sin; how can we live in it any longer? Or don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life. (TNIV)

Because of our literal baptism (immersion) into Christ (accomplished by God the Father before the foundation of the world) we were in Christ during His death, burial, and resurrection.

A confession of faith toward Christ is: Christ has died. Christ is risen. Christ will come again.

We have a corresponding confession of faith regarding ourselves as those in Christ: I have died. I am risen. I will appear with Him in glory. (Col 3:1-3)

When Christ died to fulfill the law's required penalty for sin we died with Him and were released from the requirements of the law. They no longer have a hold on us precisely because we died to them with Christ.

Romans 7:1-6

Do you not know, brothers and sisters—for I am speaking to those who know the law—that the law has authority over someone only as long as that person lives? For example, by law a married woman is bound to her husband as long as he is alive, but if her husband dies, she is released from the law that binds her to him. So then, if she marries another man while her husband is still alive, she is called an adulteress. But if her husband dies, she is released from that law and is not an adulteress if she marries another man.

So, my brothers and sisters, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit for God. For when we were controlled by our sinful nature, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death. But now, by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code. (TNIV)

There is a new way to serve and obey God for us as new covenant people. We no longer serve and obey by following a written code. No, we serve and obey by following God in us, the Holy Spirit.

Does that mean that it is impossible for us to sin if there is no law? Certainly not! What we'll see as we get to chapters 5 & 6 in Galatians is that Paul redefines sin based on the new authority in our lives. For us, sin no longer is a matter of transgressing the rules since we are dead to them. Now transgression occurs when we yield to the passions and desires of the flesh, the sinful nature, rather than yielding to the passions and desires of the Holy Spirit.

Transgression for us comes when we set aside or nullify the grace of God as given and experienced in the empowering presence of the Holy Spirit. But that's exactly what we do when we turn back to law in any form as the authority in our lives.

Paul affirmed to Peter and to the Galatians that he no longer did that.

Galatians 2:21 – “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

If we rebuild what Christ has destroyed, if we return to a righteousness that comes by observing law, then we have set aside the grace of God. Then Christ died for nothing. If there is anything we must and will see as we go through this study is that we cannot have it both ways. We can't have our right standing with God based in any way on what we do for Him. Our justification, our sanctification, our completion are by grace and by grace alone. We start by grace. We continue by grace. We finish by grace.

We can live by law and self performance. Or we can live by grace and faith. Life is a whole lot simpler, more enjoyable and more fruitful when we choose the latter.