

"Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein He pardoneth all our sins, and accepteth us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone." (Westminster Shorter Catechism, Question 33) See Ephesians 1:7, II Corinthians 5:21, and Romans 4:6.

"So faith in Christ Jesus is the opposite of all works of law; they exclude each other: to be justified 'as the result of faith = to be justified not as a result of works of law.' The two will not mingle. He who would put one foot on faith and the other on such works plunges into the gulf. Make Christ the bridge, all save the last inch, use works of law for that, and the bridge crashes the moment you step on it." (Commentary on Galatians by Lenski, p. 107)

Verse 16 contains three strong negative statements in regard to justification by works, three barricades on the road to justification by works.



3. It reflected on Christ Himself
Verse 17 "... is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.
 - a. Peter's action implied that the work of Christ did not fully justify a man; that is, the man had to keep certain ordinances to complete the work of justification. If Christ could not make one righteous, but only make him the same as Gentile sinners, this would make Christ the minister of sin. This, of course, is a terrible thought, causing Paul to add the strong idiom, "God forbid," or "Perish the thought." Literally it equals "Let it not be so!"

C. The Implication of Peter's Blunder

1. It implied that Peter did not understand his relationship to the Law
 - a. In verses 18-20 Paul uses the first person to soften the rebuke. He puts himself in Peter's place, "If I build again the thing which I destroyed ..." This is exactly what Peter was doing at Antioch. He had torn down justification by works of law by his former conduct: now he was building up again the system of justification of works by his conduct at Antioch. To continue to do what he was now doing would be to admit that he was wrong in living by faith, and thus sinned in doing so.
 - b. Paul answers this by showing the proper relationship of a justified person to the Law (Verses 19,20)

"Let law bring you to the realization of sin (Romans 3:20,) to despair that any and all work of law can ever do even the least toward securing God's verdict of righteousness. Let law make you a sinner indeed and not merely in the sense of the self-righteous Jews who called Gentiles "sinners." Let law make you give up all hope in law and by faith place all your hope in Christ."
(Commentary on Galatians by Lenski, p. 114)

Once a person has given up hope of attaining righteousness by the law and throws himself completely upon Christ in contrition and trust, he is forever dead to the law.

- c. Paul illustrates this by showing that he died to the law and its claims when Christ died on the cross. (verse 20) The penalty of disobedience to the law is death! Once a person pays the penalty, the law has no further claim. Christ died to satisfy the demands of the law. He died for us - in our place. Therefore, the law has no claim on the Christian: there is no condemnation. (Romans 8:1) Being dead to law we live by a new principle, the principle of faith in a living Saviour.
2. It implied that Christ died in vain (verse 21)
 - a. If salvation could be won by keeping ordinances, the atoning work of Christ loses its meaning. It also follows that if salvation could be attained by any other way than through trust in Jesus Christ, the death of Christ means nothing.