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We are Not Justified by Deeds of the Torah 2: 15-16

DIG: What does justification by faith mean? How does Paul use the term as compared with his opponents (2:15-16)? Why do these differences matter so much? Comparing verses 2:15-16 with Paul's preaching in Acts 13:38-39, how would you sum up what the gospel is all about?

REFLECT: The heart of the gospel is having a right relationship with ADONAI apart from deeds. What difference would it make to you if you had to earn your way to heaven by keeping all of the 613 commandments of the Torah? If you can get to heaven in any other way than faith in the shed blood of Messiah, did He die in vain? Can you imagine anyone saying to God the Father, "I don't need Your Son. I'll figure this out by myself. I'll find another way to heaven?" Do you know someone in your life that thinks like this? How can you pray for them this week?

In Galatians 2:11-21 the scene changes from Yerushalayim and the council there to Syrian Antioch, where the first Gentile church was established. Paul and Barnabas served as spiritual leaders, with help from three other men (see the commentary on **Acts, to see link click Bn – Barnabas and Sha'ul Sent Out from Syrian Antioch**)**. Paul continues his rebuke of Peter and the defense of his salvation equals faith-plus-nothing gospel.**

Earlier, we saw that **Peter** visited the believing community in **Antioch**, the largest center of believers outside of **Yerushalayim**. **He** found a community in which **Jewish** believers and **Gentile** believers freely intermingled, worshipped together, and even ate together. **Peter** did the same until **certain men from James (2:12)** arrived and applied pressure on the **Jewish** believers to separate from the **Gentile** believers. When **Peter** gave in to **their** pressure, **Paul** rebuked **him** in front of everyone.

The heart of mankind's spiritual dilemma is that we are incapable of overcoming the

total **sinfulness** that separates us from **ADONAI**. **Job's** friend **Bildad** asked: **How can a person be justified before God (Job 25:4a)?** How can a guilty and condemned **sinner** be made righteous, and thereby acceptable to a holy and pure **God**? **Justification** by **faith** is **Ha'Shem's** answer to that dilemma and need. In explaining the true doctrine of **justification**, **Paul** first states what it is here in **2:15-16**, and then gives **his** defense of this important doctrine in **2:17-21** (**to see link click Bd – Through the Law I Died to the Law**).

Paul's rebuke of **Peter** (see **Bb – The Antioch Incident: How Can You Force Jews to Live Like Gentiles**) culminated in one of the most forceful statements in the B'rit Chadashah on the doctrine of **justification** – the very doctrine that **Peter** and **the men from James** were, in effect, renouncing by **their** hypocritical separation from **Gentile** believers.[61]

We are Jews by birth and not sinners from among the Gentiles (2:15). The word **we** is emphatic and serves to emphasize the sharp contrast which **Paul** is about to make between **himself, Peter,** all other **Jewish** believers, and **the Gentles**. First-Century **Judaism** divided the world into two main categories: **Jews** and **Gentile sinners** (see **Ba – Gentiles during the Second Temple Period**). It's as if **Paul** was saying, "As for **us**, by nature we are **Jews**, not habitual **sinners** like **the Gentiles**." If you would like **Paul** to elaborate on what **he** means by **Gentile sinners**, just read about **God's wrath** against **sinful** humanity in **Romans 1:18-32** and **he** will tell you exactly what **he** means by castigating the entire **Gentile** world as **Gentile sinners**.

In this verse, one of the most important in **Paul's** letter to the **Galatians**, the word **justified** occurs for the first time in the Bible. **Yet we know that** [whether **Jew** or **Gentile**] **a person is not justified by deeds based on** [obeying the 613 commandments of **the**] **Torah, but rather through putting trust in Messiah Yeshua (2:16a). Justification is the act of ADONAI whereby, negatively, He forgives the sins of believers, and positively, He declares them to be righteous by transferring all the righteousness and obedience of Messiah to them through faith. Whatever is true of Him is true of them. It's just-as-if-I'd never sinned.**

At the Jerusalem Council, **Peter** declared the same truth in response to these **belonging to the [sect] of the Pharisees who had believed** (Greek: *peoisteukotes* from *pisteuo*, meaning *to believe*, *to have faith in*, *to trust in*) **stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to command them to**

keep the Torah of Moshe" (Acts 15:5). He declared: **Why do you** challenge **Gentile** salvation and **put God to the test by putting a yoke on the neck of the [Gentile] believers – which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But instead, we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Yeshua, in the same way as they are (Acts 15:10-11).**

Martin Luther, who started the Protestant Reformation, said that if the doctrine of **justification** by **faith** is lost, all Christian doctrine is lost. In this last section of Chapter 2, **Paul** was inspired by **the Ruach ha-Kodesh** to introduce this most essential doctrine, a doctrine **he** had preached and explained to **the Galatians** on many occasions. **He** uses the verb form of **justification** (Greek: *dikaioo*) four times in **verses 16-17** and the noun form (Greek: *dikaiosune*) once in **verse 21**, where it is translated **righteousness.** In the B'rit Chadashah these and other forms of the Greek word are variously translated as **justify**, **justification**, **righteousness**, **just**, **righteous**, and **justified**.

So even we [the Jewish believers] have put our trust in Messiah Yeshua, in order that we might be set right [justified] based on trust in Messiah and not by deeds based on Torah – because no human will be justified by deeds based on Torah (2:16b).

And to be **justified** by **Yeshua Messiah**, **the** believing **Jews** needed to reject **the deeds based on Torah**. It was as if **Paul** was saying, "Because we are **Jews** by nature, and we saw the need for **Yeshua Messiah**, and believed that **He** is sufficient for all of our spiritual needs, why now do we suddenly compel **the Gentiles** to believe in a covenant that **we** ourselves found that **we** could not keep? We couldn't keep the 613 commandments of Moses, and that is why we turned to **Yeshua Messiah**. Why ask **the Gentiles** to keep **it**?

This is the condition of the **Jewish** believer today. No amount of **Torah**-keeping can make a person **righteous**, because the root of **sinfulness** is in the fallen nature of the human heart. Our basic problem is what we are . . . not what we do. **Sinful** acts are merely the outward expression of a **sin** nature that contains **sinful** thoughts. As a result, no amount of **deeds** can save a person, because the best of human **deeds** cannot change the **sin** nature of the person doing **them**. **Moreover, we know that whatever the Torah says, it says to those** trying to obey all of the 613 commandments of Moses for salvation, **in order that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world be shown to deserve God's judgment. For in His sight no one living will be considered righteous (Psalm 143:2) on the**

grounds of a legalistic observance of Torah commandments, because what Torah really does is show people how sinful they are (Romans 3:19-20 CJB).

The Torah is important as a mirror to show us our **sinfulness**; but **it** can only reveal **sin**, not remove **it**. **But now God's righteousness apart from the Torah has been revealed, to which the Torah and the Prophets bear witness – namely, the righteousness of God through trusting in Messiah Yeshua, to all who keep trusting. For there is no distinction, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. They are justified as a gift of His grace, through the redemption that is in Messiah Yeshua . . . for we maintain that [we] are justified by faith apart from the deeds of the Torah (Romans 3:21-24 and 28).**

Only **faith** in **Yeshua Messiah** can bring a person the gracious gift of **righteousness** that provides forgiveness and salvation. **Faith/trust/belief** in **Christ** is not mere intellectual assent to the fact that **Jesus** died and rose for our **sin** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Al – How Shall We Escape If We Ignore So Great a Salvation**), but is personal **trust** in **His** death to remove and forgive our own **sin**. It is a total surrender to **Him**, not only as **Savior**, but also as **the Lord** of our life **Therefore, submit to God. But resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you (James 4:7-8a).**

All claims that salvation is through **belief** in **Yeshua Messiah** plus something else are blasphemous, satanic lies from the pit of hell. There can be no effective or acceptable human addition to **Christ's** work on the cross. This passage is as clear and forceful statement of the doctrine of **justification** by **faith** alone as can be found in the Bible.[62]