

Galatians 2:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

Analysis

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. The conditional *ei de zētountes dikaiōthēnai en Christō* (εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστῷ, "if while seeking to be justified in Christ") introduces a Judaizer objection: if Jews who abandon law-keeping for faith in Christ are thereby reckoned as *hamartōloi* (ἁμαρτωλοί, "sinners")—the category previously reserved for lawless Gentiles—then doesn't this make *Christos hamartias diakonos* (Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας διάκονος, "Christ a minister/servant of sin")? The logic: if trusting Christ leads Jews to abandon law-keeping, and law-keeping defines righteousness, then Christ promotes sin.

Paul's emphatic response: *mē genoito* (μὴ γένοιτο, "God forbid!")—his strongest negative, literally "may it never be!" This optative construction expresses abhorrence at the suggestion. The objection reveals fundamental misunderstanding: righteousness never came through law-keeping but always through faith. Being "found sinners" doesn't mean Christ made Jews into sinners; it means recognizing what they always were—sinners needing grace, just like Gentiles.

The verse exposes the Judaizers' category error: they equate abandoning law-works with abandoning righteousness itself. But if law-keeping could never justify (v. 16), then abandoning it to trust Christ doesn't promote sin—it acknowledges the

truth that all are sinners needing divine righteousness. Christ doesn't serve sin; He reveals our sin and provides the only remedy.

Historical Context

For Jews to abandon distinctive covenant markers like circumcision, food laws, and Sabbath observance was culturally unthinkable—it meant becoming like Gentile "sinners." The Judaizers argued that faith in Christ couldn't require abandoning these identity markers without making Christ an accomplice to lawlessness. Paul's response revolutionizes the entire framework: these markers never produced righteousness, so abandoning them for Christ is not spiritual regression but gospel clarity.

Related Passages

Romans 2:1 — Judging others

Revelation 20:12 — Judgment according to deeds

Study Questions

1. What religious practices or moral achievements might you equate with righteousness itself rather than seeing them as responses to grace?
2. How does recognizing that you were always a sinner needing grace change your view of Christian growth and sanctification?
3. In what ways might you subtly accuse Christ of promoting sin by His gospel of free grace apart from works?

Interlinear Text

εἰ δὲ ζητοῦντες δικαιωθῆναι ἐν Χριστὸς εὐρέθημεν
if But while we seek to be justified by Christ are found
G1487 G1161 G2212 G1344 G1722 G5547 G2147

καὶ αὐτοὶ ἁμαρτωλοὶ ἄρα Χριστὸς ἁμαρτίας
also ourselves sinners is therefore Christ of sin
G2532 G846 G268 G687 G5547 G266

διάκονος μὴ γένοιτο
the minister God forbid G1096
G1249 G3361

Additional Cross-References

1 John 3:5 (Sin): And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins; and in him is no sin.

Galatians 2:15 (Sin): We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

Romans 11:7 (Parallel theme): What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded