

Straightforward about the Gospel

Galatians Series

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Bible Text: Galatians 2:14-20

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Here in this passage the apostle Paul is confronting not only Peter, but an entire church for not being straightforward about the gospel of Christ. And here in this text Paul shows us the things that are necessary to uphold if we are to be straightforward about the gospel of Christ.

And, of course, this is such an enormously important issue because the gospel is so misunderstood. The gospel is about the redemption of mankind. And in many ways the gospel is really answering the question, "How do you fix mankind?" And there really are only two ways that mankind can hope to be fixed. One way looks good on the outside, but it is a total failure and is a white washed tomb. This way is to be circumcised on the outside, but not to have a circumcised heart.

There are only two ways to fix man. Man is always seeking a way to fix himself or to be made acceptable. Man is sort of like an approval seeking missile. And he does all kinds of things to make himself approved before men and before God.

This text is about how does one become justified before God. How is man fixed? Man is an appearance seeking kind of creature. He is a congratulations driven personality. He is always looking for a way to make himself acceptable.

Unconverted man seeks to gain approval by men through outward appearance. He seeks to be acceptable because of his own merits. Unconverted men seek to congratulate one another and shine up one another's reputations by their respectful greetings in the market places.

I meet these people all the time. I am one of them. I recognize them because I have their same impulses.

But man always, whether he is converted or unconverted, seeks to be justified by the law. He seeks to be justified by what things are outward. This passage is about things that are outward and things that are inward and because unconverted man has no life in God, he seeks to justify himself through lots of things. It may be through the image fortifying outward appearances of his job or of his car or of his sports or of his personality. He is in

idolatry of a very winsome kind, really. But he is only just trying to justify. He is seeking to be made right in the eyes of everyone else and even himself. So he shines himself up. He might shine his car up thinking it will shine himself up or having the right shoes or belt or look or reputation, his personality, whatever it might be. Man is always seeking to justify himself in his lostness.

And in most of man's efforts is nothing more than cosmetics. They are outward appearances. And this was the sin in the garden. Man wanted something better than God and man ended up making for himself his own clothes and going his own way.

This passage of Scripture really addresses the impulse in man to justify himself. If he is unconverted, to justify himself by his appearances. Or, if he is converted, he may try to resort, again, to justifying himself by appearances.

In this case it was about circumcision – justification by the outward appearance of circumcision.

Instead, what the apostle Paul does in this passage is he directs the people of God to be identified with Christ and Christ alone, that they would be so completely identified with him that all of their ambition, all of their identity would be immersed in him because there really are only two roads in the world. There is the broad road and there is the narrow road. There are the sheep and the goats. There is heaven and hell. The truth is that one is either identified with Christ and rests exclusively on the merits of Christ's sacrifice for sin or man seeks to justify himself by his appearances. And the apostle Paul is addressing this.

We have covered a lot of territory in the message that we have been studying up till now in Galatians chapter 2. In chapter 1 verses 1 through 10, the apostle Paul comes out and speaks about the threat of another gospel. And he is astonished that they have so quickly fallen back to another gospel. This false gospel is that same old gospel, man justifying himself kind of gospel. And then from then all the way unto the end of what we just read this morning, the apostle Paul is making a fight for the true gospel. And in the midst of Paul fighting for the true gospel - that man is justified by faith alone - he goes to Jerusalem and wages a war there because this same insidious idea had crept into the church in Jerusalem. And then he goes to Antioch, the great city of Antioch. It was the second or the third largest city in the ancient world. And it had a burgeoning healthy church there.

The first church that sent out missionaries was in Antioch. Paul goes to Antioch because this same bad idea that man is justified by the works of the law had been creeping in and a number of powerful and very gifted communicators were bringing this doctrine into the church and promoting it. So the apostle Paul goes and confronts Peter and the rest of the church about this error.

Paul is coming and bringing the true gospel because they have erred. And so what we find in verse 11 in chapter two is Paul's confrontation of Peter. Imagine these two giants

of the faith clashing. It must have been an amazing moment to see it because everybody saw it right out there in public. And so Paul confronts Peter and the term that is used here is a fascinating one. He strongly opposed, strongly resisted him. It was a very intense confrontation that ensued.

And so here the two most dominant figures in the church were clashing, one of them stood condemned, not that Peter was unsaved, but that he had fallen to the fear of man and was promoting things by the fear of man, not by the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And then Peter's compromise is explained and how he caved in to the peer pressure of those who had come into the church. And in order to preserve his respectability, in order to fit in with these powerful teachers that were in the church, he compromised. And Paul came to point that out.

I think that Peter is really helpful to us because he stands right in our own shadow or we stand in his shadow, however you want to say it. We often refrain from saying what we should say because of the fear of man. We are afraid to preach the true gospel because we are afraid of what People's reactions might be. And that was part of what was happening with Peter there. There were a number of things. But we stand in common ground with Peter who is fearing the party of the circumcision and thus he refrains from doing what he ought to do.

In verse 14 we find the rebuke and Paul comes and tells them that Peter has played the hypocrite.

We also, I think, need to notice not only the severity of the rebuke, but also the tenderness of the rebuke. The language that the apostle Paul uses as he explains what he is saying is, if not the whole, at least part of the speech that the apostle Paul gave in front of the whole church. It is unclear as to where the speech ends and then the final conclusion picks up. I am not too sure, but at least at the beginning we know that these are the words that the apostle Paul spoke in that church and to Peter himself.

If you just look at the literary structure of this for a moment, in verses 14 to 17 Paul uses the words we. He is using the words of fellowship and identification in the midst of his rebuke. There is sort of an implicit gentleness and connection in it even though he comes with a pretty tough message.

And then in verse 18 he shifts from the first person plural in including himself and into the first person singular. He uses the first person singular 11 times here. And he is drawing interest. He is sort of drawing himself into the picture in all of this conversation here.

So when we get to verse 14 we are coming to sort of a crescendo summary of the issues that the apostle Paul has been dealing with and he brings them down and boils them out into some very clear principles. And so here we find this man who is dealing with Peter

in two ways, with clarity and even sternness, but yet with grace at the same time. I think he is a wonderful example of how rebuke can take place in the church.

Now this is an often misunderstood text here. There are often.... this passage is often terribly misinterpreted and misunderstood. First, some take particularly Galatians 2:20 as an advocacy of some sort of a passive approach to discipleship - "For to me to live is Christ."¹ They claim that when the apostle Paul is speaking of Christ being your life, that the teaching is just let go and let God, just turn your life over to Christ. He will do everything you. You don't need to do anything. You don't need to obey anything. Christ lives his life through you. And so there is really nothing for you to do except to allow the life of Christ to flow.

I believe that is a misinterpretation of the passage. There is a kernel of it here for sure. But this is not what Paul is advocating here. He is speaking about justification by faith alone.

Secondly, there are those who use this text to reject the law of God as a guide to life. When the apostle Paul says, "I... am dead to the law,"² they interpret that wrongly. They don't really remind themselves of the context that this is being used in and so they use it to reject the law for all of life. I have run into people who have quoted this text in order to prove that God has abrogated the whole law for the Church. And there is tremendous tumult and difficulty when that happens. Some of us have experienced enormous tumult and difficulty because of the misinterpretation of this verse here. And I expect that we will probably continue to do so.

So we are in a text that is often tweaked and misunderstood. But what we find here in this passage is a lot of clarity about the gospel, about how to be straightforward about the gospel, because the apostle Paul clips through many elements of what would be called straightforwardness about the gospel.

I dare say that even before you were converted, there were many people who were not straightforward about the gospel. They were not straightforward about the exclusiveness of the gospel, that there is a heaven and a hell. They were not straightforward about the blood of Christ being the atonement for all of man's sins. They were not straightforward that Jesus Christ was the suffering servant that all of the Old Testament spoke of. They were not straightforward about the gospel.

And so this straightforwardness is always a problem. It was a problem in Jerusalem. It was a problem in Antioch and it is a problem in North Carolina today because we have the same pressures and the same problems about us.

So here we find in verse 14 the apostle Paul is committed to straightforwardness about the gospel. He says, "But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of

¹ Philippians 1:21.

² Galatians 2:19.

the gospel, I said to Peter before them all...”³ And then Paul points out the inconsistency of Peter and Barnabas in that they were not straightforward.

What do we do when we either find ourselves reluctant to be straightforward about the gospel or we see others who are not straightforward?

Well, we do what the apostle Paul did. We speak up. We need to be straightforward about it and be bold about it regardless of what that cost might be.

So Paul was pointing out that they needed to live consistently with their beliefs. Peter and Barnabas were shrinking back. They believed certain things, but they were doing something different with their Jewish brothers. What made them compromise? It was pressure from man. That is what it was.

How do you apply this? I think for me it is easy to think of how to apply this and that is: Is our faithfulness to the gospel hindered by a fear of man? Do we shrink back like Peter and Barnabas did in their day? And I dare say that we will constantly be tempted to shrink back from the gospel because the devil hates the gospel. The devil hates the waters of life running through the soul of a man. The devil hates someone knowing he is forgiven for all eternity. The devil hates the soul that has been made happy by the righteousness of Jesus Christ and is led by the good laws of God.

The devil hates that. You can always know that there will be resistance in your own soul to the communication of the true gospel.

So Paul is showing us how we must uphold the true gospel and be straightforward with it and I have identified five ways that the apostle Paul is speaking of here.

First of all, justification by faith. Verse 16.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”⁴

So our tendency to justify ourselves before we were converted was manifested in shiny cars and nice jobs and good personalities. Now that we are converted, we may do it in some of the same ways, but spiritually and religiously we take on Christian things and try to justify ourselves that way as well and we hang our faith on them.

Here the apostle is really desiring that the people in Antioch be gripped by justification by faith alone. To be justified means to be... to experience judicial acts, a ruling, a judicial ruling in time that declared you righteous. That is what he is talking about here. Where you were acquitted of the charges against you. You were acquitted of all the sins that you committed from that day and before and acquitted from all sins from that day

³ Galatians 2:14.

⁴ Galatians 2:16.

forwards as well. And so there was an acquittal that took place and where the righteousness of Christ was imputed into your soul and you were literally—we will get to this in a minute—crucified in Christ and raised up with him and his righteousness became your righteousness.

You have been trying to make yourself righteous all your life and then finally you realize that he made you righteous by a judicial act.

This is the first of six references to the term works of the law. This will be a big focus in the coming chapters - particularly in chapter three.

What the Judaizers were saying in Antioch was that you had to add something to your faith. You had to add law keeping.

Notice that he starts with the negative and then moves to the positive. Look at verse 16 at the beginning. He starts with the negative.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law.”⁵

Hang on that for a minute. We are not justified by the works of the law. And what this means is that there is a righteousness that comes from outside of ourselves to make us righteous.

Martin Luther called it an alien righteousness, something that comes from outside of you. And it speaks of the failure of the law to justify. It starts with a negative that a man is not justified. The law will fail to justify a man before God.

Paul is quoting Psalm 143 which speaks of this. Keeping the ceremonial law cannot justify you. Keeping the moral law cannot justify you. Knowing and falling in line with all the 10 Commandments cannot save you. That is what he is saying. They cannot.

So he starts with the negative.

This idea is very common that people believe that they are justified by being good. You go out in the street and you witness to people on the street. Almost everyone will say, “Well, I have been good. I am a good person. Of course I am redeemed. Of course I will go to heaven. In fact, I am better than lots of people. I am better than lots of people and that justifies me somehow.”

People in the world think in terms of justification by the law. They think they are justified by their nice personality, by the good works that they have done, the money they have given away, the way that they are so nice to the teller and just how good they are. They don't steal things or anything like that. But the truth is that doesn't justify.

⁵ Ibid.

But unregenerate man always wants to think that he is justified by being a good person. This is not new.

Let me read to you an inscription, an epitaph on a tomb in the first century. Here is how it reads. “Here lies Regina. She will live again, return to the light again, for she can hope that she will rise to the life promised as a real assurance to the worthy and the pious in that she has deserved to possess an abode in the hallowed land.”

Notice she has deserved. She was pious and she deserves to be there.

“This, your piety has assured you. This your chaste life, this your love for your people, this your observance of the law, your devotion to your wedlock, the glory of which was dear to you. For all of these deeds your hope for the future is assured.”

Well, that is unregenerate man. And we often go back to just thinking that if we would just... if we could just fix this up a little better, just shine this up a little bit more just like we used to shine up our personalities and our cars and we will be better. We will make it. We will make it to heaven. If I could just be a better dad. If I could just be a better husband. If I could just be a better worker, a nicer guy. I will be saved. I know I will.

And that is what Paul is saying no to. So he begins with the negative and says, “No. A man is not justified by any works of the law, either your law or God’s law. It doesn’t matter.”

And then he moves to the positive.

“But by faith in Jesus Christ.”⁶

And this is the central message of the whole book of Galatians for right now we are on ground zero. Verse 16 is ground zero in the book of Galatians. Many people have commented on that. This is the center of the book right here. This is the most important verse in the whole book in Galatians and it probably really does summarize everything that is said. Man is justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law.

Here the apostle Paul is quoting the Old Testament prophet Habakkuk. He is using the law to speak of the role of the law. In Habakkuk 2:4 we read, “Behold the proud, His soul is not upright in him; But the just shall live by his faith.”⁷

So this is an Old Testament idea. It comes from the faith of Abraham and a number of other places in the Old Testament. The apostle Paul is bringing forward this idea that man is justified by faith. Jews were never justified by the law. They were only justified by the faith of Abraham, so says the apostle Paul in the next chapter here in Galatians.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Habakkuk 2:4.

And so this is faith that justifies.

Now what is faith? Faith has been explained in a lot of different ways. Let me just explain it this way. Faith really is two sides of one coin. First, the first side of that coin there is an abandonment of faith in ourselves. When you have faith in the substitutionary death of Christ and his work on the cross to take the penalty for your sins, there you are abandoning faith in yourself. That is the first side of this coin. You are abandoning all faith in yourself to justify yourself whether religious means or just cool hip human means by just having the right image and the right music and the right personality. There are just all kinds of ways that you can follow after in seeking to justify yourself. The first side of the coin is abandonment of faith in yourself.

And the other side of the coin is complete reliance on Christ for your righteousness, that your righteousness is not your own, but it is Christ's and Christ's alone.

So those are two sides of the coin. One is abandonment of self and the other is reliance upon Christ.

And so when you say you have faith it means that you have renounced all confidence in yourself and you have relied on Christ. You have trusted in his shed blood on the cross. Maybe sometime in your past you went through the evangelism explosion training. One of the illustrations that they encourage people to use if it is appropriate is the illustration of the chair. Do you know what I am talking about? The chair.

Maybe it doesn't tell all, but it certainly does at least tell something that is important to understand. And the purpose of the chair illustration is to acquaint someone with God's holiness and the meaning of sin, to bring into true repentance, to help him to understand how he is trusting in something that will not justify him. One chair is used to illustrate reliance on self and the other is used to illustrate reliance on Christ alone.

You set two chairs in the room and you are explaining that you are sitting on this one chair. You are relying on yourself. But you cannot be saved until you get off that chair and sit on this other chair and that this chair is the justification of Christ where you rest your whole weight on that chair. It is supposed to help someone to understand that they are trusting in something that really cannot hold them and they have to move off of it completely into this other chair.

True repentance is a change of mind and to rest all of your faith on one thing that is different than what you have been resting it on before - whether your nice personality, your good gifts, your generosity, your faithful church. Whatever it might be that you are using to justify yourself, you have to leave that because you cannot trust it. It is not reliable. It will fail you because no flesh will be justified by the keeping of any law.

And so here Paul is finding himself in a church that has become confused about this doctrine and they have been trying to justify themselves by obedience to the law.

And so here the apostle is bringing us to the doctrine of justification by faith alone. By the way, this doctrine is a hill to die on. This is the central doctrine of the Christian faith. This is the king. This is the king and queen of all the doctrines of the Bible. It is the doctrine that is really the beginning of every revival in history. It was the heart of the revival in the Reformation. It was the heart of the revival that took place in the Puritan era. It was the heart of the Great Awakening here in our own nation. It is the only sound heart of any revival at any time, even the one that we are praying for today in our own era.

The doctrine of justification by faith is so important for us. It defends the Church against legalists who say that men can be justified by works. It also protects the Church from libertines, from lawless people who say that grace nullifies the law. This doctrine destroys both of those bankrupt positions that harm the Church. And the doctrine nourishes the church with grace from heaven. The doctrine comes and helps God's people to have something that they never could and never will be able to have on their own and that is favor with God through grace and grace alone.

Paul speaks of it later here. We will get to it in just a moment. But we know that the ground of this doctrine is the love of God toward mankind. The Church cannot know and cannot see love without this doctrine. So it is a critical doctrine and this text is important for every believer.

So the first thing that the apostle Paul brings to us is justification by faith. That is his first line of argumentation against those who are in Antioch and Peter himself. And then, secondly, he speaks of holy living in verses 17 and 18.

“But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!”⁸

So the apostle Paul is actually answering a question that is coming up in everyone's mind. Well, if you say you are justified by faith alone, then you are just going to go do whatever you want. You are going to go live like the devil, right? Right?

Paul says, “No. That is not what this means and that is not what I am saying.”

This is not a throwing out of all of the laws of God. That is not what he is saying. He is in his speech preserving holy living in the Church and that is what this verse is about here. No, no, certainly not. And he uses a very, very strong term here. *mh genoito* (may ge-noi-to). He is using extremely strong language to say absolutely not. No, this is not what we are advocating at all. Salvation by grace through faith does not endorse sin.

Paul's logic is that if justification leads to sin then Christ becomes an encourager of sin and Paul is saying, “Absolutely not.” Christ is not endorsing sin. Christ is not a minister of sin. Sin is disobedience and Christ is not a promoter of disobedience to the law of God.

⁸ Galatians 2:17.

But you have to understand this in context of what Paul is saying in the whole historical situation that he is addressing.

This has to be understood in context with the Judaizers. They taught that man was justified by works. Paul acknowledges that the law shows us that we are sinners and that the right use of the law is to read it to convict us of our sin and motivate us to a holy life while trusting Christ for atonement for our sins. But he denies the position of the Judaizers and says, “No, this is the promotion of holy living.”

The third part of Paul’s argument is that we must die to the law. We must understand this if we are going to be straightforward about the gospel. What does it mean to be dead to the law?

In verse 19 he says, “For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.”⁹

Now, slow down here for a second. Look at this really carefully.

“For I through the law died to the law.” So notice the person. There is me. There is the law. And then there is death to the law so that something might happen.

So the law is doing something. The law makes Paul dead to the law. That is what he is saying. That is kind of strange, isn’t it? What the law makes me dead to the law. What is that all about?

Well, first of all, it was the law that convicted him of sin, number one. Number two, the law showed him that he could not keep the law because he kept on breaking it. He understood that if you break one law you have broken them all. The law convicts you and you realize that you cannot keep the whole law, because even if you break one, you have broken them all.

You might say, “Well, I didn’t murder anyone today.”

But if you broke one part, even if you lusted over a woman, you have broken the whole law. So the apostle Paul is saying, first of all, the law convicted him of sin. The law showed him that he could not keep the law. And, thirdly, that he would have to die to the law for salvation and trust in Christ alone.

In other words, that he could not trust in his law keeping. The law showed him that he had to die to the law in the sense that he would die to trusting it. He would have to no longer trust it at all. So that is the logic that the apostle Paul is using. That is how through the law Paul died to the law.

⁹ Galatians 2:19.

Now when the apostle Paul uses the term law he uses it in different ways. This is also a very long discussion that we don't have time to really tease out in all of its depth, but sometimes Paul uses the law to mean the whole Old Testament. Sometimes he uses it to mean just the 10 Commandments. Sometimes he uses it to refer to the ceremonial law and you have to look at the context to try to figure out what he is talking about.

And so this context makes it clear that Paul is referring to the law's inability to make you perfect through keeping it. Because he is saying to the people in Antioch, "Circumcision can't make you righteous. Keeping that part of the law doesn't do it." So that is what Paul is talking about.

I believe Paul is talking about the whole Old Testament, the ceremonial law and the moral law, all of it. Try to keep any of it to justify yourself and you will fail. It doesn't work. And I believe he is using a very broad term here when he uses the law. I think he is encompassing everything.

He can't mean through the Old Testament I died to the Old Testament. He can't mean, you know, through the case laws I died to the case laws. He means something far bigger than that. He is saying through the keeping of any law I cannot be justified so I have to die to that idea. I have to die to that idea that if I keep anything there I am justified because the true gospel is about justification by faith. It is not whether or not you obey the law regarding adultery or theft or covetousness. It is not about that at all because God's moral law is applicable for all times. But what he is saying is you can't rely on that for your salvation.

So he says, "I am dead. I died to the law."

So this principle of hermeneutics, looking at the context is very important. The context is the Judaizers and what the Judaizers were claiming was that righteousness comes through the keeping of laws.

So the context shows us what this means and that law keeping cannot save. Circumcision cannot save nor does anything else.

We are dead to the law. To preach the gospel properly, to be straightforward about the gospel we have to be very clear that one must become dead to the law in order to be saved. That is being straightforward about the gospel. That all these shine ups, all these nice things that you concoct to make yourself acceptable are nothing. Only one thing matters, the justifying work of Jesus Christ on the cross.

Now, as I said before, some have taken this to mean I no longer need to read or obey the law. And that is not what this means at all. Let me give you three things that it does mean.

Paul is saying here, number one that we have died to the law of righteousness by works. And we cannot depend on our works for our justification. That is the first thing he is saying.

Number two, that he died to the law of condemnation.

And, number three, he has died to the law of ceremony. The Old Testament ceremonial law was a picture of how God forgives sin. And the apostle Paul is saying, "I died to the efficacy of all those keepings of the law for my salvation."

Matthew Henry says this. "But though he was thus dead to the law, yet he did not look upon himself as with law. He had renounced all hopes of justification by works of the law and was unwilling any longer to continue under the bondage of it. But he was far from thinking himself discharged from his duty to God. On the contrary, he was dead to the law that he might live unto God. The doctrine of the gospel which he had embraced, instead of weakening the bond of duty upon him, did but the more strengthen and confirm it and therefore though he was dead to the law, yet it was only in order to his living a new and better life to God, a life that was more agreeable to him."

So to say that we are dead to the law doesn't mean that we throw away our Old Testaments or throw away any other commandment of Scripture. That is not what he is saying. Rather, he is promoting living unto God.

"That I might live unto God."¹⁰

So the Legalist says you are saved by the law. But Paul says we are saved by living to God, by our hearts turned upward toward him. In whatever state of imperfection we might be found, God saves us right where we are. We don't have to shine up our lives in order to be converted at all. He saves us right where we are and we look toward heaven and then he begins to sanctify us over time. In his own time, by the way. And we... so that we might live to God. And this is a work of the Spirit of God as we will learn later in Galatians. And we will find ourselves thinking the same thing that Paul said to the Philippians. "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."¹¹

So there is this matter of death to the law. If you are going to be straightforward about the gospel, you must make it clear that one dies to the law. And then, fourthly, if you would be straightforward you would have to speak of the crucifixion of Christ.

In verse 20, "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."¹²

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Philippians 1:21.

¹² Galatians 2:20.

So now the apostle is explaining the doctrine of crucifixion and he says, “I have been crucified with Christ.”¹³ And he uses the perfect tense here which has to do with an action that has continuous effects and what he is saying is that the moment you believe you are crucified with Christ. And your old sins were crucified with him.

Now, you know, with God time is a different matter than it is with us. You know, for him a day is as of a thousand years. And so how God works all these things in time we don't... we can't quite grasp. But when you believed in Christ you were simultaneously crucified with Christ. I don't know how that works out, but that is what is being taught here, that you were crucified with Christ. And your old sins were crucified on the cross with Christ as he took the penalty. You were one with him in his crucifixion. And so we participate in his death. We, when our hearts finally break and we believe in the gospel and we cry out to God for mercy that his righteousness would come to us, all of our sins are crucified on the cross. Imagine that. Crucified, nullified and killed there on the cross. All of the wrath of God toward us was swallowed up in the cross of Christ. He took all of that wrath and absorbed it all into his body and we were there with him. It is as if you were hanging there with him. And your sins were just swallowed up in his, in the wrath that he took. That is exactly what is being communicated here.

You were on the cross with him and he took all of the penalty of your immorality, your theft, your coldness toward God, your worldliness, all of the ways you have been trying to shine yourself up and make yourself into such a cool person, all the wrath from rejecting God and all those things, is swallowed up in Christ and you are hanging there with him on the cross and he is taking all of your punishment on his body. That is what is being spoken of here.

And so we are conformed to his sufferings.

You know, it seems that every time we are going through a study of a book, I find one commentary that stands out among all the others so that it grips my heart. Well, there is one on the book of Galatians. It was written in 1604 by William Perkins. And here is what Perkins says about this verse:

“Thou must be conformable to Christ in thy sufferings. He suffered in love. And the more his passion increased, the more he showed his love. Even so in thine afflictions and sufferings thy love to God and man must be increased. Though man be the cause of thy afflictions, Christ suffered in obedience. ‘Not my will, but thine be done.’ Even so in all thy sufferings thou must resign thyself to God and quiet thyself in his will.

“Christ suffered in all humility, humbling himself through death on the cross. Even so we and upon our afflictions we are to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God confessing our sins and entreating for pardon.

“Fourthly, he suffered in faith as a man depending on his Father's goodness even in the middle of his passion. Even so are we.

¹³ Ibid.

“Fifthly, he went on in sufferings to the very death. Even so we are to suffer in the resisting of sin even to the shedding of blood.

“Lastly, the principle care of Christ was to see the fruit of his sufferings so that when we are distressed, our care must rather be to see the fruit of our distress than to seek deliverance. This conformity with Christ in his passion is an infallible work and token of the child of God and the sign that we are crucified with Christ.”

What Perkins is saying is that Christ obeyed, Christ had faith, Christ was humbled and he suffered. And that is life he has called us to as well. And so he says when you see faith, when you see humility, you are seeing the sufferings of Christ in your own life.

He says this. “This is the foundation of all thy comfort. If you believe thyself to be crucified with Christ ye shall see thyself freed from the dominion of the law and sin, from hell, from death and condemnation and to thy great comfort shall see thyself triumph over all thy spiritual enemies. For Christ doeth and thou doest the same. If thou art settled on this that you feel the virtue of the death of Christ to kill sin in thee and to raise thy dead soul to spiritual life.

“When the Shunamite’s child was dead, Elisha went and lay upon him applying face to face, hand to hand, foot to foot and then his flesh waxed warm and revived. Even so apply thyself to Christ crucified, hand to hand, foot to foot, heart to heart and thou shalt feel in thyself a death of sin and the heat of spiritual life to warm and inflame thy dead heart.”

Here Perkins is just identifying what conversion is when a person feels in their heart the life of God flowing into their soul, the life of God and the soul of man, hand to hand, heart to heart, foot to foot, Christ suffering and taking, taking his punishment for us.

And then he says Christ lives in me.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”¹⁴

And so we are saved by the perfection of someone else. We are not saved by our own perfections. We never could and we never will be and the temptation is to think that somehow we can. We become converted, we see how backward we are in so many areas. We see our sins and somehow we think that if we could just get a little bit better here and a little bit better there we would be more acceptable to God. And that is not true and that is exactly what the apostle Paul is attacking there in Antioch and with Peter and with Barnabas.

And then we find the apostle Paul embracing the grace of God in verse 21.

“I do not set aside the grace of God.”¹⁵

¹⁴ Galatians 2:20.

You see, there are two things you can do with the grace of God. You could set it aside and put yourself in its place. Paul says, “No, don’t set aside the grace of God. Don’t put yourself in place of the grace of God. Don’t put your works there. Don’t set it aside and replace grace with you. That is a bad idea.

He says, “I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”¹⁶

So if we would be straightforward about the gospel, then we would be straightforward enough to embrace the grace of God and to preach it clearly that God is a God of mercy toward repentant sinners, those who would come to the realization that they fall short of the glory of God and their only hope is to trust in the shed blood of Jesus Christ to atone for their many sins which are sending them to hell and they realize that they are bound for hell, that even one sin is enough to throw them into hell, even one disobedience makes them break the whole law, even one little thought makes you break all the laws of God and turn you into a Satanic debtor and one who will be finally exterminated in the lake of fire along with the devil and all of his angels. And so we dare not set aside the grace of God.

To set aside the grace of God, he says, makes void Christ’s sufferings. He says, “For if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.”¹⁷

So this is why Paul is so passionate about this issue. If you begin to trust in your own righteousness, then you are despising the cross of Christ and what he did and you are saying that Christ died in vain. You don’t need the cross. You just need your next act of righteousness to make you feel better about yourself.

This is why there are people who say, “You need to preach the gospel to yourself every day.” Because in our desire to be justified as we have been living our entire lives, we continue to try to be justified by the works of the law. We used to try shining up our little personalities and having the right job and cars and images and clothing. And then we become Christians and we do the same thing with our law keeping and we think that justifies. And it does not.

John Owen in his book *Communion with the Triune God*, says this, “Consider the provocation of your sins against Christ and consider the cross.”

That is another way of saying, “Preach the gospel to yourself every day.”

So what the apostle Paul is saying here is stop looking to yourself to be justified. Stop looking to yourself and look to Christ. Get off the chair and get on a chair that holds. That

¹⁵ Galatians 2:21.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

is what he is saying. He is saying that man's attempts to justify himself will never work. And so man must be justified by faith in Christ alone.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones wrote a book called *Spiritual Depression* and here is a question he asked in that book. Would you like to get rid of this spiritual depression? Is anybody having a spiritual depression? Lloyd-Jones was speaking to believers. Would you be rid of your spiritual depression, says Lloyd-Jones? He says the first thing you have to do is to say farewell now and forever your past. Say farewell to your past if you want to escape your spiritual depression. And realize that your past has been blotted out by Christ, that his blood has separated the sins of your past as far as the east is from the west. Never look back on your sins again, but rather say, "It is finished. It is covered by the blood of Christ."

He said that is your first step in escaping your spiritual depression.

And here we are standing at the beginning of a new year. And let's just make this very clear that we will not be justified by our resolutions that we make this year, that we will not be justified by our cool, great ideas about how we are going to strategically approach this next year. We are only justified by the Son of God who shed his blood on the cross for us.

This is the first thing that we must do in this year is to have our eyes fixed on the cross of Christ. That is the key to all of our maladies.

In the cross of Christ is taken care of 1000 psychological problems because it is Christ on the cross that justifies and satisfies the wrath of God and introduces a person into a new life in which God sanctifies him in his own way, by his own will, through his own sovereign hand, all the days of his life.

And so we should look to the cross of Christ.

When I was a boy I had a watch, a wrist watch like probably no wrist watch being carried by boys today. If you carry a wrist watch today, the clock is often electronically calibrated by electronic means inside the watch. But when I was a boy you had to wind a watch. You had to set a time either in the morning or in the evening to wind your watch. And then I remember vividly when they came up with self-wind watches. And you could shake them and there was a spring inside and you self wound the watch. So you could walk around and shake that thing. Do you remember that? Some of you old guys remember that.

And that is how you wound your watch. It was a revolution. You no longer had to wind your watch. You just had to walk around.

And then they took another step for further and they put a battery in it. And now clocks just run until the battery runs out. You don't have to wind them anymore.

Here is what I would just like to suggest. Let's go back to the old watch. And let's look at the cross of Christ and let's look at the cross of Christ every day. Let's see the looming grace of God. Let's see the enormous sacrifice that Christ made for our sins. Let's watch him swallow up all of the wrath for our sins at the beginning and the end of every day. And let's be nourished in this cross of Christ. And that, my friends, is being straightforward about the gospel of Christ.

God has called us to be straightforward about the gospel of Christ. And it means that we are justified by faith. It means that we engage in holy living. It means that we die to the law. It means that we were crucified with Christ and it means that we embrace the grace of God lest we say to the world that Christ died in vain.

Let's pray.

Lord, we thank you for this glorious freedom that you have given sinners like us. How short we fall, how inadequate we are today and yet how adequate you are for us. And so now, Lord, I pray that you would help us as a people to be very straightforward about the gospel to ourselves and to all those that we see in this world, that we would not stop being straightforward about the gospel of Jesus Christ. I pray that you would give us a year like no other where our straightforwardness was better than it ever was in Jesus' name. Amen.