

Paul opposes Cephas

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[0 : 00] And our reading tonight is taken from the book of Galatians chapter 2. You'll find it in the Bible in front of you in page 1169. That's page 1169, Galatians chapter 2, and we start in verse 11.

Galatians 2, 11. When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.

But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray.

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 the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

[1 : 27] So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law.

Because by works of the law, no one will be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin?

Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live for God.

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.

I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

[2 : 46] Well, good evening, and let me add a warm welcome to Martin's, and thank you to David for that reading. Let me pray as we dig into God's word this evening. Father God, thank you that you speak to us through your word.

We ask that we would treasure you, and treasure your word to us, as the very life that we need. Open our ears that we may hear you speak, and by your spirit convict and shape us, that we may lead joyful lives of holiness, connected to you, and overflowing with thanksgiving.

Amen. I wonder how you'd answer this question. What do you think is the biggest lie in the whole world? I wonder maybe what would be the contest in your head.

Maybe you can get something for nothing, basically. Maybe the sequel would be better than the original. Never true. Maybe you don't have to change your diet or exercise.

Just take this pill. It'll be great. Maybe nothing bad will happen if you don't read the instructions.

Maybe I didn't realize it was a party. But bigger than any and all of those is the lie believed by most people on the street, a lie that's at the heart of many people's actions, a lie that's at the heart, arguably, of every other world religion.

[4 : 09] And that lie is, I can save myself. People go around thinking, well, either there's no God, and I'm king of my own life anyway, or there is a God, but I would probably be good enough for them.

Or maybe if I just tried a little harder, but not too much, just a little bit, and then I'd be good enough. And I can just go it alone. Anyway, God would probably want me on his team. I'm a pretty good person.

I'm not like those bad people, so I am good enough. I can save myself. I think that attitude is endemic in our world.

Arguably, it always has been. But the core truth is that it's absolutely impossible. Nobody can save themselves. Because the problem isn't that we're just not quite good enough.

The problem, according to the Bible, is that we're on the wrong side of a holy God. Under his wrath, we have no ability to change that situation. So without his intervention and his help, we are completely unable to be in his presence.

[5 : 13] Not justified to be with him because of our sin. It's not even a possibility. So, wonderfully, the message of Jesus, the message of the whole of the New Testament, and central to the Christian faith, is the gospel message that tells us that through Jesus' death on the cross, God has made a way that we can be forgiven, be made new, and be justified to be in his presence.

To be made righteous, able to be members of his kingdom, and drawn in. Only Jesus can save us. So if the most dangerous lie is that I cannot, the most dangerous lie is that I can save myself, then the most wonderful truth is that Jesus can save me.

Because he died for me, and I can have faith in him. This is the gospel of justification by faith alone. It's one of the definitive issues of the early church.

It's so integral to Paul's message in Galatians that it provokes a significant conflict between him and the apostle Peter, as we heard in our passage. Justification by faith is at the beating heart of Paul's gospel.

And it's the key thing that he wants to communicate to this church through this letter, and to all those who read it. The core message that our salvation is achieved through nothing other than faith in Christ alone.

[6 : 43] So we're just going to look at the way that Paul talks about that idea in this passage under three headings. Peter's dangerous actions, Paul's necessary intervention, and Christ's wonderful gospel.

We'll see what happened between Peter and Paul, and then warm our hearts with Paul's gospel. And my challenge to us this evening is to take the words justification by faith, and walk away at the end not thinking these are cold theological words, but thinking these are wonderful, exciting, and life-defining words that I love.

So let's dig into the passage then. So first, Peter's dangerous actions. Now I wonder if when David read this, you got a bit of a sense that maybe it was a bit of an overreaction, that Paul opposed Peter and called him out publicly in front of the whole church.

Verse 11 says that Peter stood condemned, and you just might think, well, it's a bit much, isn't it? Couldn't they just have had a private chat? Maybe they could have just sorted it out in the back room, come out and be like, it's all fine, guys, don't worry.

Maybe Paul's just a bit aggressive. But in order to answer that question of was this just unnecessary aggression, I need to take us back to the first century.

[8 : 05] So get your minds back walk in the kind of dusty, Near East, sandals, falafel, donkeys era, and go to the early church.

Jesus has come. He has died on the cross, been buried, risen, and ascended, and the early church has been formed. A group of previously fearful fishermen have become the first wave of gospel evangelists taking the good news out to the world.

It's an exciting time for Jewish people because the Messiah has finally come to save them, and they can know him. It's an exciting time for Gentile people because they're welcomed into God's kingdom, and the church starts to pick up pace.

At the same time as the message builds pace, though, the persecution coming behind it speeds up as well. The church is growing every day, but it's growing under threat.

It's an exciting time, but it's a tense time. And the leaders of this early church are responsible for guarding the gospel that they had received from the Lord Jesus, for keeping it correct, keeping it pure, so that every person who heard it would hear the same gospel.

[9 : 20] Now, Paul, as we've already heard in the letter of Galatians, received his gospel as a direct revelation from Jesus rather than meeting him in the flesh. He told us in the last chapter that whilst he didn't need to confirm his gospel with the apostles, when he did, it turns out they had the same one.

This is the gospel that the early church was founded on, and he was sharing it too. So far, so good. So, well, what happened with Peter? Well, I think we need to be careful with Peter here that we don't misunderstand Peter the apostle.

We need to get the conflict right, what it was and what it wasn't. If you want a bit of background to this, you can go and read a bit more in Acts 15, but we're just going to concentrate on what Galatians says here.

So the first thing is that there isn't evidence that Peter has given up on the gospel message. So don't think that Peter has become some sort of false teacher in this, that if you were to go and hear him, he would preach verbally a different gospel.

No. If you listen to Peter, you probably hear the same gospel as Paul, the same gospel that they've always had from the start. Because that's not what Paul is disagreeing with him about.

[10 : 33] The problem was, if you look down at verse 12, who Peter was and wasn't having dinner with. End of verse 12, when these men arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid.

Does it sound like a big or small issue in your mind that Peter's begun to separate himself off from the Gentiles?

Because this is Peter of whom Jesus says in Matthew 16, you are Peter and on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it. He is one of the closest friends of Jesus, one of the most important leaders of the early church.

So what has he done? Well, out of fear of the opinions of Jewish leaders, he's changed his actions. Started to just step away and dissociate from and withdraw from the Gentiles who have become Christians.

To the point that he's just stopped eating with them. And we might think it's just a small social change, isn't it? It's not like he's stopped preaching the true gospel. But what does Paul say in verse 14?

[11 : 45] When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel and hear that not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. There's just complete hypocrisy in the life of Peter and the other apostles and other people who have been led astray by this message that you could preach one gospel and then live out a different one.

And Peter's hypocrisy began to spread through the early church. He's so influential that many others even Barnabas says Paul Barnabas the encourager Barnabas Paul's traveling companion Barnabas who gets it right and is a good guy even he has begun to just think well maybe I can just dissociate from these Gentiles have one foot in the Jewish teachers camp and one foot over here of the gospel.

So verse 13 there's a sense that it's snowballing very quickly that more and more have joined in this hypocrisy and all of a sudden you think the whole of the early church leadership's just being led astray from true gospel action.

So let me ask at the point at which so many influential leaders in the early church are being led astray into hypocrisy what else could Paul have done other than to confront this absolutely public thing that these apostles have done.

Peter's living is so anti-gospel that it could derail the entire early church project so really the very truth of the gospel is on the line. But let me ask again why is it that who you have dinner with has such far-reaching implications?

[13 : 35] So secondly we're going to look at Paul's intervention to help us answer that question. The intervention starts halfway through verse 14. I wonder who you ate your lunch with when you were at school.

Were you on the cool table at the school cafeteria? Were you sitting in the corner? Were you somewhere else? It does feel a bit of a kind of school cafeteria question. I'm sure that some of you already have the kind of famous mean girls line you can't sit with us in your heads because it's just that kind of childish like you can't be with us you're not welcome here thing.

But who you eat with is significant because it's a sign of who you accept. Who you believe is welcome with you. Who is in your tribe.

It actually really says a lot about who you are and what you believe. So as Paul starts to tell us what he said to Peter we get a dawning realization of just how big a problem not eating with the Gentiles really was.

So again halfway through verse 14 Paul says this you are a Jew and yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?

[14 : 54] So the first thing that Paul points out is that Peter hasn't been living under the Jewish rules for a long time now because ever since Peter received the gospel he's been eating with

Gentiles who become Christians.

Think about Jesus in the gospels always eating with the sinners and the tax collectors and all of the bad people and Peter's been with him the whole time. He's been continuously with the out crowd the unacceptable.

So in separating from the Gentiles he's just gone back to his old ways living under the rules of Jewish tradition rather than living under the gospel. And the teaching of Israel's religious elite is essentially if you follow the rules one of them being separating yourself off from the unclean Gentiles then you'll be right with God on his good side justified.

But notice right at the heart of that is the big lie that we talked about at the start. That your actions make some impact on whether God will have you or not.

Ultimately that's just back to you can save yourself in some way. Because if you can add something to your salvation and God's acceptance of you, all you're saying is there's something that God has not done for me and I need to earn it from him.

[16:18] He is not a good God who gives good gifts. He is a God who is marking me off to make sure I get the right thing and I need to pass his test. So Paul actually maintains in verse 15 that before the gospel, outside of the gospel, there was a difference between Jews and Gentiles in their history.

But look at what he says in verse 16. Now we have to read this quite closely. He says three statements in verse 16 here that help us to understand this. First is a general statement that even people who became Christian from a Jewish background know that nobody is justified by the works of the law.

That was always true in the Old Testament. People are instead justified by faith in Christ. The gospel of Jesus has blown justified by law following completely out of the water.

Secondly, we get a personal statement from Paul, so we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus. it's a kind of remember who we are, Peter, and all these others that have started to follow him.

We are people who have been justified by the faith we have already put in Christ. We've never trusted the law for our salvation since we came to hear the gospel from Jesus.

[17:40] And so third statement, something truly universal, by the works of the law no one will be justified. Paul is essentially saying we've never believed that. Not from the start until now have we ever picked up a gospel that says you can earn your way to God because it simply isn't the gospel.

It's not what we received. Paul is essentially saying to Peter that he knows fine well that the law doesn't save. So why is he acting the opposite way?

Why is Peter living out a gospel of justifying by law following when the gospel is actually all of grace, all of gift? Peter's actions are beginning to make it look like you need something other than the gospel to be welcome in the kingdom, which is completely undermining the gospel he's preaching. In fact, his actions are beginning to kind of rip the body of Christ in half to destroy the church by putting up a huge barrier in the middle that says in this body there is separation.

separation. So do we now see how dangerous that refusing to have people around for dinner thing was? Only the right people can eat with me, I will not eat with the wrong people.

[18:55] It's just hugely divisive. So thank God that Paul did actually intervene like this. It must have taken real courage to do so. And let's face it, certainly the majority of us here aren't from a Jewish background, so we are Gentiles and thus would have been barred from the church forever if this had continued.

It's a common phrase that we all know well, isn't it? Actions speak louder than words. And Peter's actions spoke a false gospel far louder than the true one he was speaking.

For Peter it was who he ate with. though the gospel that he spoke said that everyone was welcome and united equally in Christ, his actions said there is a divide and we're on the right side of it and that some people are just second class citizens in the kingdom.

It's worth us thinking at this point that we could be in danger of doing the same. Knowing the gospel and being able to communicate it with others matters, but we're also called to live lives that back that up all the time.

So to focus in on the main issue here, who do you have lunch with? Who are the people that you would and wouldn't associate with? There will always be pressure to live as a hypocrite in this, to say that you're united with all those who believe in Jesus but functionally not live it out.

[20 : 28] It's easy to speak about unity but then to only talk to people you know on a Sunday. It's easy to speak about love but hard to extend your invites to the pub out to the people who you find a bit awkward.

We say the gospel is for everyone but we find ourselves making a lot less effort with those who have different political opinions, different ethical opinions, people from different cultures who make different life choices, maybe those who are different class background to us, the people at work who are just different, who we don't get on with.

And every time we do that we're making it look like there is a secondary standard somewhere, that there is a hurdle that people have to jump over somewhere, that there is some line that must be towed for people to really come to know God.

Essentially something outside of faith in Jesus that we need to be saved. And friends that will always get in the way of the true gospel. But to turn that on its head, just look at the unifying power of the true gospel.

It's something that we celebrate actively every time we have communion together in this building. That we really are united into one body with no divisions. That as we come together we share the same salvation and the same saviour.

[21 : 51] It's one of the most beautiful truths of the gospel. And therefore one of the things that Paul is most offending. Because one of the most beautiful things about it is the gospel's ability to unify people who are so very different to us.

Think that in Christ you are united with refugees on the other side of the world and people you will never meet and people from backgrounds you couldn't even understand. And people in this building who are very different to you.

But that unity is absolutely real. people in this world. And there is a gospel worth fighting for and a gospel worth publicly disagreeing about and a gospel worth having dinner with anyone for.

It's something that our lives must reflect. And so we need to be careful we don't end up like Peter living hypocritically to what we say we believe. Maybe even occasionally we will need to be appalled and disagree with a brother or sister who's acting in a way that makes the gospel less visible.

But doing so is worth it because this gospel is just so very good. And so finally I want to take us on to our third point which is just focusing on this wonderful gospel that we have.

[23 : 07] Christ's wonderful gospel which is all over everything that Paul said and also in this last little paragraph here from verses 17 to 21. Now I said at the start of this sermon that I wanted the words justification by faith to not seem like cold theological words but heartwarming words that we love.

So let's see why that is in this last section. As Paul goes on to address the possible objection to his gospel that he's preached in Galatia here.

Now it seems in verse 17 that people had maybe been saying in the background that or maybe the Jewish teachers had been saying in the background that if this gospel was really true that if this really meant that you could actually just associate with the unclean Gentiles then surely this gospel just leads you into sin.

If this really is a gospel that says you don't have to do anything and in fact you cannot do anything to earn your place before God. You just get it freely as a gift. Then why on earth would you even bother trying?

What just stops you sinning indiscriminately all the time? It's strong words isn't it? It's a strong thought. You can imagine how Peter might have just sat there and gone oh you know we don't like that.

[24 : 32] That's not what the gospel is about. And maybe that's one of the reasons he just started to back off. But as Martin brought up in his question unless we've got to that moment of really?

Really it's actually this free? Not only do I not earn it at all but actually it's still given to me. Up until we've gotten to that point kind of seen the offense of the gospel then we can't come to him.

But when confronted on that does this gospel lead us into further sin? Well look at how strong the rejection is at the end of verse 17 doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin?

Absolutely not. The most emphatic thing Paul could possibly say here. Because if following Christ makes me a sinner then I'm really just living back under the law again aren't I?

I'm just saying actually I'm back under the do it right then you're welcome thing. And that's what Paul's spent his entire ministry trying to tear down.

[25 : 40] It's the thing that he has thoroughly dismantled. In fact in verse 19 Paul says that through the law he's seen his need for righteousness that a law can't provide and so he's had to die to justification by law following.

He's had to turn around and say this way of living this way of coming to God doesn't work. Actually all this proves is that I need someone to save me. This says that I am condemned and deserve death and Paul says actually yeah and there's nothing I can do about that until I have Christ. He's had to die to justification by law following so that he might live for God. The false teachers say that faith in Christ makes you pro-sin and anti-God and Paul says it's completely the opposite way around.

That self-saving law following just condemns us to death under the law and is the most anti-God attitude but justification by faith in Christ leads us to glorious wonderful new life in him and so in fact it's the only way to please God and so naturally Paul goes on to just dig into that and swim around in it in verse 20 this wonderful truth that the gospel through the gospel Christ has bought all those who are justified to see what verse 20 says I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me now the life I live in the body I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me so follow that through according to Paul I have been crucified with Christ so when Christ was crucified 2,000 years ago and died that's when I died if I'm a Christian the old sinful me was crucified with him and died then so when the law says you deserve death we say yeah and I died 2,000 years ago with him and so it's no longer

I who live but Christ who lives in me so we participate in his resurrection because the price for sin has been paid well now I live a Christ life in Christ I've been given a new life in the body one where the spirit of Christ dwells in me something I could never have had before I'm justified by faith in him not only welcomed into God's kingdom but with God dwelling in me and that's what being saved by Jesus looks like and it just completely blows the save myself lie out of the water because that can't offer you anything but this gives you everything the other wonderful thing that Paul points out here in verse 20 is just how personal that salvation is this isn't God throwing salvation at a distance to people he doesn't want to interact with no this is him coming personally to us just see that second part of verse 20 again

[28 : 51] I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me not only is justification by faith in Christ huge it's also lovely I live by faith in the one who loves me and proof that he gave himself for me and any Christian in this room can appropriate those words for themselves so next time you pray just sit there and think I have faith in a Christ that loves me and gave himself for me Jesus says in John's gospel no greater love has a man than this than to lay down one's life for one's friends what does he then go on to do voluntarily give up his life for us out of love and obedience to the father and if that's the truth why would you ever go back to the save yourself lie and if that's the truth

Jewish religious leaders why would a person keep on sinning because look at the tone and loveliness of this relationship if that is your relationship with God why would you ever decide to keep sinning indiscriminately against him you just couldn't because you would love this God so much because of the love that he has shown to you and so Paul concludes his argument of these first two chapters with verse 21 his gospel the gospel of justification by faith doesn't set aside the grace of God but embraces it however the Jewish leaders teaching of justification by law following the save yourself project not only does set aside the grace of God but according to Paul end of verse 21 essentially cancels out the cross and says Christ died for nothing see how grossly offensive the save yourself thing is to turn around to God and say

I don't actually really care about your grace and your goodness and the gift of salvation that you're offering me I want to earn it for myself and honestly don't really think the whole Christ on the cross thing is that big a deal and can you think of anything more offensive and more anti-God than that attitude to him denying his grace to his face saying that Christ's death on the cross was pointless no in following justification by faith we embrace the wonderful truth of the gospel we say yes to the grace of God we say yes to Christ's death on the cross that it was all God made it to be so I want to just finish by really focusing us in on what this gospel of justification by faith is God in his grace sent Jesus to die on the cross for us Jesus willingly went out of obedience to the father and love for us he gave his life that we might be free from the punishment of sin in unity with him and his

resurrection we are free to live for him and be indwelt by his spirit together we are united into one body the church in which we dwell equally loved with all the barriers torn down and all that we possess through the gospel in which we are justified by faith alone there's nothing left for us to do but marvel at that depend on it thank the

Lord for it live by it and defend it there's nothing so beautiful in all the world as the truth of that gospel so let's thank the Lord for it in prayer let's pray heavenly Father thank you that you are good and your gospel is true that we are justified not by any of our own actions because Lord that would be so offensive to you in rejecting your good grace as given to us remind us Lord that not earning it is actually the best in use that through what Christ has done on the cross for us that we truly are forgiven that we are justified to be in your family in your kingdom and in your presence with your spirit indwelling us so when we live every day to the praise of your glorious grace amen but a final prayer as we close who loved me and gave himself for me we praise you heavenly father that you demonstrated your love in the gift of the Lord

Jesus Christ and that having taken our sin to him we have died with him and now we have this empowered new life Christ in us that we might be preserved for a future of glory with you and day by day be renewed by your spirit to live and work to your praise and glory we praise you for all of these treasures found in your gospel message and we pray that you would help us to display that gospel in the way that we are united with others in fellowship and the way we live our lives this week and so now to him who was able to keep us from stumbling and present us before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy to the only God our saviour be glory majesty power and authority through Jesus

[34 : 36] Christ our Lord before all ages now and forever more Amen Father God our food Lord eggs ghost Kollege Finn