

Galatians: Freedom through Christ – Part 4

Justified by Faith in Christ – Galatians 2:11-21

Crosspoint – Dave Spooner – October 5, 2025

Introduction:

- **The purpose of this message is to firmly ground your understanding that you are made right with God by His grace through faith in Christ, and by receiving His Spirit, you have the power to walk in line with the truth of the gospel.**
- Paul, in his letter to the church in Galatia, is trying to realign the believers there to the truth of the gospel because they have been led astray by false believers who were trying to convince them to believe that in order for them to be right with God, they must not only believe in Christ but also follow the Old Testament laws, which would enslave them to the law.
- Paul was not having it, in any way, shape, or form, and he was doing everything in his power to convince them to live according to the truth of the gospel. As he writes to the church in Galatia, he is writing for the benefit of every church, every believer, in every location throughout all time, including you and this church.
- We pick up his letter again today starting in chapter 2, verse 11, and we will read the next ten verses until the end of the chapter. Paul, in this section, describes a confrontation with Peter about how his behavior was dividing the church and derailing the gospel. And then Paul goes on to explain how we are made right with God so that we can live rightly for God.
- We are going to read this section in its entirety, and then we will circle back and break it down into three sections and talk it through.

Galatians 2:11-21 (NIV) (Page 1002)

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 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. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

14 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 Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

15 “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16 know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

17 “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

19 “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 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. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

Walk in Line with the Truth of the Gospel

Galatians 2:11-14 (NIV)

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 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. 13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

14 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 Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”

- We don't know when this happened, if it was before or after the conference in Jerusalem (Gal 2:10). We just know that this happened and that Peter knew better. Peter was given a vision (recorded in Acts 10) of a sheet that was let down to earth with all kinds of animals in it, and he was told to go ahead and eat. Peter refused, saying that these things were impure. God told Peter not to call anything impure that God has made clean. God let Peter know that the gospel was also for the “unclean” Gentiles and that the ceremonial law was done away with. It was now okay to eat with non-Jewish people and to consume non-kosher food.
- Peter, at one point, was living in line with the truth of the gospel and this freedom from the law. He rightly had no problem eating non-kosher food and eating with Gentiles. Then when some guys came from James who was in Jerusalem, Peter became afraid of what they might think of him, so he reverted to following the old Jewish laws. Because Peter was an influential leader, others followed his lead, and even Paul's ministry partner Barnabas was led astray and joined in Peter's hypocrisy.
- At some point, Peter went to Antioch, which was Paul's sending base. This was where Paul confronted Peter on his hypocrisy which was dividing the church and destroying the gospel. Paul called out Peter's hypocrisy, and confronted Peter's as well as the Jewish group's behavior. He told them that they had gotten off the straight path of the gospel, that they were not “acting in line with the truth of the gospel (v.14), and that they needed to make a change (repent) and get back on the right path. The right path is knowing that we are saved by grace through the faithfulness of Christ, and that we cannot be set right with God by following the law; we must be born again through faith.
- First, this passage reaffirms the facts that all people are under the Word of God. The Bible does not align itself with us, but we are to align ourselves with it, including the apostles themselves. No one or no teaching is above the authority of the Word of God.
- Secondly, this passage highlights the power of peer pressure to either get us off track (the Jews from Jerusalem) or to get us back on track (the correction from Paul).
- Thirdly, this passage emphasizes the power of your behavior to either reinforce the message of the gospel or to undermine it. It is important to stay on track and to walk in line with the truth of the gospel.
- After using this example of people—even Peter—getting off track, Paul lays out the reason why this way of thinking and living is so wrong and off target.

You Cannot Be Made Right with God by Obeying God's Laws

Galatians 2:15-16 (NIV)

“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 16 know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

- All the law (the Torah) can do is tell you what is right and what is wrong (read Romans 3-7); it does not give you the power to change your heart or to do what is right. We cannot be justified, declared righteous, or be “right-ified” with God by the law. The only way we can be justified, or made right with God, is by faith in Jesus Christ, or better yet, by the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. The pure Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world (John 1:29).
- Every person, including Jews, must put their faith (rely on, trust in—illustration of a chair) in the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. You and I know that no one can be right with God in and of ourselves, no matter what we do or how hard we try. By obeying the law of God, no one can be or will be justified, or stand acquitted in the courtroom of God. This is why we must have grace given to us through and in Jesus Christ; this is the only way we are to be justified.

You Are Made Right by Christ’s Spirit Living in You

Galatians 2:17-21 (NIV)

“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! 18 If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

19“For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. 20 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. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

- Paul then raises the objection that is in the mind of Jews that says, “Well, if we don’t obey the law, then we are just like the 'sinner' Gentiles, so then does God think that sinning is okay?” Paul says, “Absolutely not!” Then he says the only thing that is really sinning is to rebuild the wall that the gospel has torn down between Jews and Gentiles, making only those who obey the Torah laws the ones who are justified as children of God.
- Then Paul goes on to explain how this works. The law of God kills us, we die through it, and the law tells us that we can never, ever measure up to be good enough to be justified. The law kills us and our effort to obtain righteousness on our own. **We must die so that we might live for God.**
- When we come to Christ, we admit that we cannot do what the law requires; we admit that we are a sinner. We ask for forgiveness and receive grace, and then God gives us a new Spirit, His Spirit, to live in us so that we can live for God. Christ lives in us by His Spirit, giving us a new heart and new identity. And the more we live together, the more we become like Him (like in marriage).
- Now that God has given us a new heart by His Spirit, we have the power and the freedom to live in the body, to become like Jesus, and to follow His Spirit to live like Jesus, the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. This is the only way to be justified by God and the only way

we can live according to the gospel. Because if we think we can be justified or be righteous by our own effort (which we can't), then Christ would have died for nothing!

Conclusion

- The heart of the gospel is this: you are not justified by what you do for God, but by what God has done for you in Christ. If we try to add anything to Jesus, we nullify grace and deny the cross. But when we live by faith in the Son of God, who loved us and gave Himself for us, we are free, free from the weight of the law, free from the fear of failure, free from the need to perform.
- This is not freedom to live however we want. This is freedom to live for God. The old “you” has been crucified with Christ. The new “you” is alive in Him. His Spirit fills you, His love secures you, His cross defines you, and His resurrection empowers you.
- So, walk in step with the truth of the gospel. Don't drift back into slavery. Don't let peer pressure, fear, or pride pull you off the path. Stand firm in grace. Live each day with confidence, because the life you now live in the body, you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave Himself for you.
- That is your identity. That is your freedom. That is your hope. Amen.

Our prayer team is available to pray with you after the service near the “prayer” sign at the front of the sanctuary and also in the prayer room, next to the offices.

Questions for Small Groups

1. Peer Pressure and Gospel Living: Peter gave in to fear and compromised the gospel. What are some ways you feel pressured to act differently than what you know is true in Christ?
2. Authority of God's Word: Paul confronted Peter publicly because he was “not in step with the truth of the gospel.” How does this passage remind us that even church leaders must submit to God's Word?
3. Justification by Faith: Verse 16 repeats three times that we are justified by faith in Christ, not by works. Why do you think Paul was so insistent on driving this truth home?
4. Grace vs. Performance: In what ways do you find yourself slipping into a “performance mindset” before God, thinking His approval depends on your good works, spiritual habits, or religious activity?
5. Crucified with Christ: Galatians 2:20 says, “I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” What does this verse mean practically in your daily life?
6. Living by Faith: What does it look like for you to “live by faith in the Son of God” in your current season, whether in your work, family, or personal struggles?
7. Guarding the Gospel: If Paul had not confronted Peter, the truth of the gospel might have been lost in Antioch. What are some ways we, as individuals and as a church, can guard the gospel and keep it central in all we do?