

Keep In Line With the Gospel

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- [0 : 0 0] Now, can you turn in your Bibles to the book of Galatians, chapter 2? I'm going to read from verse 11 to 21. We're looking at this letter as a church, seeing how Paul time and again says to his readers, there is no other gospel other than the gospel of grace.
- And here in this section, he speaks to Peter and he speaks to us saying, keep in line with the gospel. So Galatians 2 and at verse 11.
- Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, you're 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 who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing 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 observing the law. Because by observing the law, no one will be justified.
- [1 : 3 5] If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am 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 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. Amen. So keeping in line with the gospel or keeping our gospel balance, that's what we're thinking about this morning.
- I don't know whether you are one of those people that finds balance naturally an easy or a hard thing. Having taught two boys to ride bikes, I developed something of a mantra as they were getting started to help them with their balance.
- [2 : 4 6] Tell them to get their eyes up and look straight ahead as quickly as possible. Because that was key for balance rather than veering off one way or the other. And it was really important for safety.
- Because when you're on narrow paths and you've got cars on one side and you've got people and you've got bins and you've got holly bushes on the other side, you really want to be able to go on that straight path.
- Balance is important. Following the right path is safety. And that brings us to what Paul is talking about to Peter and to the others gathered.
- In verse 14, he confronts Peter and says, you're not acting in line with the truth of the gospel. So his idea is the gospel is a straight path to walk on, but it's possible even for Christians to veer off that.
- The word that Paul uses is the word ortho, which we recognize from orthopedics, where people align our skeletal system or an orthodontist, where people straighten teeth.

[3 : 48] Galatians is a book all about laying out the straight path of the gospel. So let's just remind ourselves what we have discovered about that so far.

We've discovered that it's good news. And it's good news that comes from Paul directly from Jesus. So when he brings the gospel of grace, it comes from Jesus.

He tells us that in chapter 1. Part of that good news invites us to reflect honestly on ourselves. So Paul will say that we are sinners, that we are lost and we are unable to rescue ourselves.

That before a holy God, we stand guilty and condemned before him. Which sounds like bad news, except for the fact that God has made it possible for us to be accepted, despite all of our sin, because of his great grace and goodness towards us.

That Paul says because of Jesus' death on the cross, because he's come to live perfectly when we couldn't, and because he's come to die as the perfect sacrifice in our place for our sins, it is possible for us to be accepted by God.

[5 : 01] Not because of our merit, not because of our law-keeping, not because of our religious performance, purely because of God's grace in Jesus. So that's the straight path of the gospel.

But this passage shows us there's two ways that we can veer off that. The first is Peter's error, where we see him implying the need for extra laws in order to be accepted by God, sometimes known as legalism.

You need to do certain things in order for God to accept you. Or the accusation from verse 17 onwards of Paul's opponents, that preaching the gospel of grace will lead to lawlessness.

So there's this other way to get off the gospel. It's like, Jesus saved me so I can do whatever I want. That's the mindset that some people had when they heard Paul's teaching.

And the answer to both of these mistakes is the gospel of grace. It's the straight path that stops us from falling into either of these ditches. So Paul is going to speak to Peter about stuff that he knows.

[6 : 05] He's going to remind him about gospel balance. So I want to just draw three different things that Paul invites us to remember. Firstly, remember that hypocrisy is horrible.

And when we think about the confrontation that happens in verse 11 to 14, we see the danger of hypocrisy. Quick recap, because some of us weren't here last week.

In Galatians chapter 2, verses 1 to 10, we've got a meeting that happens in Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas and Titus go and they meet Peter and James and John, the pillars of the church, and they come to agreement on what is the gospel.

So they shake hands on this reality that you're accepted by God through putting your faith in the Lord Jesus alone. You don't need anything else. Gentile people don't need to become Jewish.

So they agree to that. And one of the implications of that is that then it's possible to enjoy sharing meal, having fellowship, sitting down at a table with any other believer, regardless of their background.

[7 : 08] So they have shaken hands on that. But now Peter and his friends have returned to Antioch. Paul and his friends have returned to Antioch. Peter comes to visit, and now there's confrontation.

Let's see why, verse 11, let's see why Paul has to oppose Peter to his faith. In verse 12, we read, before certain men came from James, Peter used to eat with the Gentiles.

Okay, so that was the situation. He understood the gospel gives me this freedom to say, we're all one in Christ Jesus. It doesn't matter what your background is, so they're having meals together. But then, when people came from James, from Jerusalem, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles.

So now this other group comes, and he begins to feel pressure. What will they think of me? What will they think of me sitting down to eat with these people in this way? So he draws back. So now you've got a situation where it's Jews over here and it's Gentiles over here.

And we're told why he does that. End of verse 12, he does it because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. So we've met these guys before. They're religious leaders, sometimes known as Judaizers.

[8 : 24] They've got this slogan, unless a person is circumcised and keeps the ceremonial laws of Moses, they cannot be saved. Peter's had trouble and hassle from these guys before, and so he pulls back to avoid having that confrontation again.

But the impact of that is serious. Verse 13, The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray.

So the problem here is hypocrisy. We talk about a failure to practice what we preach, and in a sense, that's what's happening with Peter. The word is drawn from the theater. When an actor would put on a mask in order to play another character, to hide his own identity in order to play a part, that was known as hypocrisy.

Being two-faced. What's happening here, the reason why Paul confronts Peter is that Peter is masking his Christian convictions.

He is masking his true identity as a follower in Jesus. He's playing the part of an unbeliever in the gospel. The gospel says we're all one in Christ, but Peter, by his actions, is saying, well, actually, no, we're not, unless you start to keep our Jewish laws.

[9 : 52] And because of fear of others, because of people-pleasing, there is this massive impact. So the other Jews in Antioch, they're led to follow Peter, and even Barnabas, the leader of the church in Antioch, is led astray.

So here is a warning to us. Hypocrisy spreads like a virus. And so we need to be aware of the influence that we have on others.

As parents, for example, we need to be aware of the influence that we have on our children, our children who see the true us. Do our thoughts, do our words, do our actions, do they convey the gospel of love and grace, or do they convey something else?

We need to be aware of the influence that we can have on our family and our friends, because that can be a positive, but as in Peter's case, it can become a huge negative.

As Christians, we're encouraged not to mask who we are and what we believe as the people of God, to not try and lead some kind of a double life.

[11 : 06] I remember one of the first jobs I had after graduating. I was working in a call center, a fairly large team, and one of the members of that team, his language was appalling, but worse than that, he would often make really crude and really racist jokes.

I was new, and I was young, and I didn't know how to handle that. I didn't know how to have that conversation, and so what did I do? I masked my convictions.

I was guilty of hypocrisy, failing to live out what I believe. And we can all find ourselves tempted to do that, can't we? If we're here and we're new students, one of the best advice that I could give if you're a Christian is get that out there.

Get the fact that you're a Christian out there. Don't try and hide it, because it only becomes more difficult to maintain a consistent witness if you're pretending, trying to lead some kind of double life.

So what we see from Peter's example is that hypocrisy is horrible. It's dangerous. And Paul responds, a public scandal is being created. So verse 14, Paul confronts Peter publicly.

[12 : 22] When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter, in front of them all, this is a public thing, and notice he says to Peter, look, you're out of line, not because you're being rude and unwelcoming and perhaps racist, which he is by his actions.

He's saying you're out of line with the gospel. Because whereas faith in Jesus should be the basis of church unity, Peter is implying that it's faith in Jesus and faith in these religious ceremonies that's the basis for church unity because that's the way to be accepted.

So he's going into legalism and he's leading people astray. And so Paul is going to call him back to the gospel because the key to balance, of course, as we're looking up and as we're looking ahead, if we don't want to veer off, we need to be looking straight ahead and we need to be looking to Jesus.

Not looking at the opponents who might make us quake in fear to keep looking to Jesus. And as we remember the gospel, we remember that we're accepted by Jesus while we were his enemies.

When we think about divisions that exist in society, Jew, Gentile, nothing was bigger than the division between a holy God and us as sinners. But yet God was reconciled to us through the sending of Jesus, through his sacrifice.

[13 : 53] So we've been accepted by Jesus while we were still enemies. Therefore, we can and we should welcome anyone in Christ who has faith in Christ.

We shouldn't add extra barriers as Peter was doing. And in response to the fear that he feels and sometimes that we feel also, there's that reminder that in Christ Jesus, we have the acceptance and the approval of God.

And as we reflect on that and as we think, well, what approval could possibly matter more to us than that, there's how we'll be able to stick to the reality that we're saved by grace and by grace alone.

So that's the first thing to remember, that hypocrisy is a horrible thing. Second thing to remember from verse 15 and 16 is that we are justified in Jesus.

Let me read verse 15, the beginning of verse 16 again. We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners, notice that's inverted commas, that's the way Jewish people would talk about Gentiles, very derogatory way of talking, know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ.

[15 : 10] So here is our first mention in this letter of the word justified and the idea of justification. And again, take us back to Martin Luther, the great reformer.

He says that if the article of justification be once lost, then is all true Christian doctrine lost? This is a big deal idea. So let's walk closely and carefully and slowly through this idea and to see what is justification and also to see what does it have to do with walking in line with the gospel.

So first of all, what is justification? Well, J.I. Packer, the Bible scholar, is very helpful in this. He says it's a legal term. So it's drawn from the courtroom and it's the idea of a judge who declares of a man on trial that he's not liable to the penalty of the law, but rather is entitled to all the privileges due to those who have kept the law as he receives the verdict that is the opposite of being condemned, being acquitted, being declared to be not guilty.

So Paul is taking us into God's courtroom and Paul will say, Peter, remember. Remember that you and me, remember that everyone were justified by faith in Jesus alone.

And because of that, let that shape how you live, let that shape how you treat other people. Just to take a step back, if we were to ask the question of people, what's the biggest problem that we face as human beings?

[16 : 53] Perhaps our answer in here might be different to the answer that we would find on the streets. Many people would answer terrorism, Brexit, and economic fear, disease, injustice, pollution, those kind of things, which are obviously significant issues troubling us today.

But biblically, the big problem, the big question that we all need to find an answer to is, how can I be right with God? And even more pointed than that, how can I, as a sinful person, be right with a holy God?

When Jesus was on the earth and he was teaching, he reaffirmed the two great commandments that we find in the Old Testament, summaries of the Ten Commandments.

So Jesus said, the great commandment is to love God with all your heart and soul and mind and strength. And the other great commandment is like it, love your neighbor as yourself.

So with all of our heart and all our desire, with all of our mind, all of our motivation, with all of our actions, we are to express love to God and love to others.

[18 : 11] Not just sometimes, but always. Not just to some people, but to all people. And when we start to reflect on that, when we start to allow our conscience to kick in, I'm sure, like me, you recognize that we stand guilty of breaking those two commands.

And so there is for us, therefore, a serious problem. We've got a God who is perfectly holy, a God who hates sin, a God who calls us to this perfect standard of perfect love, and a God who is the judge of us all, and then there's us who have broken his perfect law.

So one of the things that justification reminds us of, and it's really important, I think, to be reminded of this, it reminds us that we will all be in God's courtroom one day.

For some of us, we may feel like that's years and years into the future, but one day, we will all stand in the dock before God to give an account for our lives. And so the question for us is on that day, how can we hear a verdict of not guilty, given what we know about God, given what we know about ourselves?

How can we escape the guilty verdict? How can the breach in the relationship be fixed? And what we discover in this passage, and what we discover as we listen to all the voices around us, that there's really two alternatives that are suggested.

[19 : 44] How can I be accepted by God? Well, it's either by our work or by faith in Jesus and His finished work. There really are no other alternatives suggested.

And Paul uses three different ways to drive us to the reality that we are justified by faith in Jesus alone. There is no other way.

So he begins with that general observation that we read in verses 15 and into verse 16. So this is something that Jews had discovered. Jews, with all the privileges of God's law and God's promises, being God's people, living in God's place, Paul can say, as a Jew, I know that the only way anyone can be right with God is through trusting in Jesus, not by trying to keep the law.

The law is there to remind us God is holy and we are not. The law is there to remind us that we need a Savior. So we've got that general observation, but remember he's speaking to Peter here and he makes it personal.

In the second part of verse 16, he says to Peter, so we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law.

[21 : 07] So he turns to Peter, you and me, Peter, this is true for us. We didn't put our faith in Jesus so we could have a spiritual top-up, so we're kind of trusting in Jesus but kind of trusting in the law.

We trust it in order that we would be justified. Peter, you know as well as I do, the only way that anyone can be saved is through trusting in Jesus. And then to drive it home further, he reminds Peter that this is what was taught in the Old Testament.

So the last part of verse 16 is a reference to Psalm 143 in verse 2 which we sang earlier because by observing the law no one will be justified.

One point made three ways. We can never ever by ourselves be good enough for God to declare us not guilty. So Peter is damaging the message of the gospel by implying that people need Jesus plus ceremonial law in order to be saved.

We do damage the gospel whenever we suggest that we need anything other than faith and trust in the Lord Jesus to be saved. To be justified, to be declared innocent, we need Jesus.

[22 : 28] We need the great exchange that happens at the cross. What is it that happens at the cross? We have Jesus the one who comes as our representative, the one who lives in perfect obedience to the extent that he obediently goes to the cross to be the sacrifice and the savior that God had promised.

So there on the cross the law keeper dies for law breakers. And what happens is that God, when we put our faith in Jesus, God declares us to be righteous because the righteousness of Jesus Christ is credited to our account just as Jesus takes our guilt and sin and dies for it on the cross.

So he gifts us his record of righteousness so that we can be declared by God justified. And there's wonderful assurance for our faith in this.

As John Murray, the Scottish theologian, puts it, God must accept into his favor those who are invested with the righteousness of his own son.

Let's use an analogy of a bank account. So imagine that you are somebody who is in a huge amount of debt. Monday morning rolls in, you wake up, terrified, how am I going to pay off all these bills?

[24 : 01] Posty delivers some letters, got some more credit card debt that's mounting up, you got payday loans that you need to pay back, you've got a letter from the bailiff saying that he's coming to take your possessions unless you can pay and you have nothing so you are about to lose everything.

So you're in that position of guilt and fear and anxiety, you get no idea where to turn, you get no hope and then you get a message, a phone call from your bank manager to say that somebody has come into the branch and he's paid off all those payday loans and he's paid off all the credit card debt and he's satisfied the demands of the bailiffs and so you have no more debt and not only that, he's placed a vast fortune into your account.

Now that is what God has done for us in the gospel of grace. Jesus has cancelled the debt of our sin and he's given us his perfect righteousness.

That's the only way that we can ever possibly be declared not guilty before a holy God. So to keep our gospel balanced, to stop veering off into legalism where we think we need to add to our salvation or we need to contribute in any way, we need to remember this truth, that we are justified in Jesus and Jesus alone.

If we're not a Christian, here is truth for us to receive, that bearing in mind that one day we'll all stand before God in the dock, let Jesus be a representative.

[25 : 37] Let him be the one whose record you place your hope in rather than your own because he is willing to save you and to credit his righteousness to your account so you can be in the family of God.

And for us as Christians, let's represent this unlike Peter who falls off into legalism and pulls the church astray. Let's avoid things like being judgmental or being full of pride or maybe making our salvation really centered on ourselves so if we're having a good day we feel really good and think that God's bound to be pleased with us whereas if things go badly we start to have all kinds of doubts and fears because we've made it more about us rather than we have about trusting in what Jesus has done for us.

So remember that we are justified in Jesus. The third thing to remember from Paul's confrontation with Peter is remember that the cross is central.

Now verse 17 is a complex one I think it's hard to exactly see what's going on but let's read it. If while we seek to be justified in Christ it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners does that mean that Christ promotes sin?

Absolutely not. Now this seems to come from an accusation and Paul is getting lots of accusations from the other false teachers and it seems to be the accusation that that the faith in Christ alone for God's acceptance is a dangerous thing to teach because they imagine that it will encourage people to then abandon God's law.

[27 : 18] People will get the idea oh great I just need to trust in Jesus and then I can do whatever I want and I'll be absolutely saved. And so people are saying Paul that's what your gospel is going to lead people to and Paul responds at the end of verse 17 absolutely not God forbid.

And the big point of verses 17 to 21 is that the gospel of grace does not lead us towards lawlessness because as he makes clear in the gospel we are united to Jesus Christ.

That we have been crucified with Christ we are made new creations in Christ Christ lives in us and because of that we have new power new desire for holiness we've got this new identity we've got a new motivation for obeying the law not out of fear but out of gratitude because of what Jesus has done for us.

So the gospel of grace does not lead to lawlessness because it connects us to the perfectly holy and obedient one. And Paul uses dying and rising language to make that point and to show that the transformation that happens in the gospel.

So in verse 19 for example he says, For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

[28 : 48] What does he mean there? He means that he died to the law as the way to be right with God. He died to trying to use the law to earn his way to God.

And in actual fact the Old Testament law was what showed him that that was pointless and wrong. That he could never meet the standards of a perfectly holy God.

So that now he's trusting in Jesus he can live by faith. Trusting in the death of Jesus as his source of salvation. Not trying to trust in himself and his own ability to perform.

And that brings all the difference in the world. Verse 20. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me.

So when a person becomes a Christian when by the Spirit Jesus comes to dwell in us the perfect one comes to dwell in us. The holy one comes to dwell in us.

[29 : 48] Therefore there is a new ability and a new desire for holiness. A true Christian is never going to say I have no interest in obeying God. Jesus said many times you will show love by obeying.

And then he goes on to say the life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Not trusting my work Paul says trusting in his finished work. Living in obedience out of gratitude for the costly salvation.

salvation that he has received. And as he ends his confrontation verse 21 he reminds Peter once again that it's all down to grace. He says I do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness could be gained through the law Christ died for nothing.

Peter remember that. Church remember that. if there was any other way to be saved why would God have sent his son Jesus to die?

[30 : 59] That just makes Jesus' death a pointless tragic waste if we by our own steam can find our way into God's acceptance.

sins. We can think about it like this. Now imagine a man who comes home one evening and he turns the corner of his street and he sees his house is up in flames and he begins to run towards the house and he hears the sirens but they're in the distance.

They're still going to be a wee while and he charges into the house and he gets his wife and his children out of the house. So they're safely on the street and then the fire engine arrives, the fire crew come out and the first fireman rushes into the blaze and perishes.

Now if we were to hear that kind of story we'd say that's a pointless waste. He didn't need to go and risk everything because everybody was safe.

But when we think about another story, same man coming home from work, turns the corner of his street, house is ablaze, he runs to his front door and he can't get in the front door because of the flames and he sees his wife and children on the second floor and he can't reach them.

[32 : 15] Then he hears the sirens, then the fire crew come with their ladders and then a fireman risks his life and gives his life in order to rescue.

Changes everything, doesn't it? Now the man has seen what true love is, seen true rescue. And Paul says to Peter and says to us, remember, Jesus came on a real rescue to rescue us in our need, in our helplessness when we could not save ourselves.

He gave himself to death to rescue us and all because of his love and his grace. And it's as we remember that, as we remember the cross as central, as we remember that reality, that's the antidote to the virus of hypocrisy.

Remembering what Jesus has done for us. It's the answer to the false paths of legalism and lawlessness to reflect with gratitude on the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

It's the key to gospel balance, to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and his finished work on the cross.