

The Gospel of Grace Overcomes Division

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Date: 31 January 2016

Preacher: Dave Nannery

[0 : 00] Okay, well, there's this sort of recurring theme in the New Testament that I've recently begun to notice.

I noticed it last summer as I preached from the Gospel of Luke, and we encountered there Jesus being invited to a dinner party, getting all confrontational with his hosts.

That's something that Jesus did, I can think off the top of my head, of at least three times Jesus did in his earthly ministry. And we're going to encounter yet another awkward dinner party today in our sermon on the book of Galatians.

It seems to be a recurring theme, you know. I don't know what it is. Maybe we should think about that. If you're ever thinking, you know, man, it would just be great if Jesus were walking the earth today and I could meet him.

Well, don't invite him over for dinner, okay, whatever you do. Because things are going to get weird. And it seems like Jesus is not the only person to really get up in people's business at dinner.

[1 : 05] The Apostle Paul is going to recount to us in our text today how he did something similar at a dinner that occurred 15 years later. So he kept that tradition alive. We're continuing our sermon series on the New Testament book of Galatians.

Galatians, where our sermon series is called the Gospel of Grace, which is the subject of the book of Galatians. Now, if you're new here or if you're not familiar with the book of Galatians or even with the Bible in general, Galatians is originally a letter.

It was originally a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to churches in the first century towns of Galatia. Now, Galatia was a region in what we would call today Turkey.

This letter to the Galatians is not a happy letter. Paul wrote some letters where in which he just had this spirit of joy, of encouragement at the condition of these churches.

Unfortunately, Galatians is not one of those letters. Because Paul is upset. There are some teachers. There are some teachers that have followed him after he left. They have followed him to these churches.

[2 : 14] And these teachers have been communicating a message that undermines the gospel, the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ that Paul had been delivering to these churches.

Paul's already encountered these false teachers in sort of his home church, his sending church in the city of Antioch. And this encounter in Antioch, it turned awkward.

This is where the awkward dinner party took place. When Paul confronted the Apostle Peter, that Apostle Peter, the one that Jesus said, on this rock I will build my church. And Paul confronts this man, this towering figure in the early church.

He confronts him in public right in the middle of dinner, right in front of everybody else at the church of Antioch. And we're going to find this story in Galatians chapter 2, verses 11 through 16.

Galatians chapter 2, verses 11 through 16. If you're unfamiliar with the Bible, it's, I'd say, about, you know, three-quarters of the way through your Bible. It's one of the shorter books at the end.

[3 : 23] Galatians chapter 2. If you don't have a copy of the Bible, if you haven't received one at this point in the service, please just raise your hand. One of the ushers will be happy to provide you with a copy of Scripture.

This is important because we're going to keep coming back to it. I'm going to assume that you have the text in your hands, that you're able to refer to it, whether it's a paper copy or whether it's on your smartphone.

So I'll be reading, beginning in chapter 2, verse 11 through verse 16 from the English Standard Version. This is the word of the Lord to us this morning. But when Cephas, and that's another name for Peter, But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood

condemned.

For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles. But when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?

[4 : 46] We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. Yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ.

So we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Because by works of the law, no one will be justified.

All right, so he stands in front of everybody else, before them all, he says, and he confronts Peter. Wow! Now, as a wise sage once said, Why you got to be so rude?

Why would Paul do that? That's embarrassing. Why couldn't Paul have taken Peter afterwards and brought him, you know, behind closed doors and just sat down with him and got him tea and then, you know, gently suggested, you know, maybe Peter, you should start spending more time with the Gentiles.

Why did he have to do this right there in public? And the answer to that question is this, that Paul is fighting a deadly infection. Paul is fighting a deadly infection that has been spreading from church to church, an infection that has now made its way to the church in Antioch.

[6 : 06] Here's what the nature of the disease is. Paul and Peter and many other Christians in the early church come from a Jewish background.

They are Jews. And that's not an accident. Because if you study the Old Testament of the Bible, you'll learn that the people of Israel, they were God's chosen people.

They were a nation that God bound himself to with covenant agreements. He promised to make them a great nation on the earth, to bless all of the earth through them. And through the prophet Moses, God gave the people of Israel his law.

And what this law is, the purpose of this law was to detail to them, to explain to them in specific and concrete terms, how they were to love him and how they were to love one another.

That's what the law is. It simply teaches you how you go about loving God, how you go about loving other people. Because a lot of times we don't know how to do it. The people of Israel were a people who were to be holy.

[7 : 14] They were to be a people who are set apart for the Lord, to love him, to love others, to be his representatives on the earth. And so the law of Moses taught them how God's people were to live holy lives that reflected their relationship with him.

Now that's key. They had a relationship with God. God had set them apart. And the law taught them how to live on the basis of that relationship. The law did not establish their relationship with God. Their relationship already existed. The law told them how to express it. But something happened in the time after the Old Testament was finished.

Many of the Jews, many people who were part of this remnant of the nation of Israel, they began to see the law not as an expression of their already existing holiness, their set-apartness for the Lord. They didn't see the law, they stopped seeing the law as their expression of their covenant relationship with God. They began to see it as the means to a relationship with God. They saw their obedience to the law as the basis for their relationship with God.

[8 : 24] It's easy to see how they fell into this trap because the Jews had been conquered by the Roman Empire. And like many other nations that fell under the jurisdiction of Rome, they were beginning to see their national identity erode.

They were gradually assimilating into this Greek and Roman culture. They were forgetting who they were as God's chosen people. The Apostle Paul who wrote this letter, he came out of a Jewish sect that was called the Pharisees.

If you read the Gospels, you find that Jesus interacted with the Pharisees quite a bit. They were very popular in the area of his hometown in Galilee. The Pharisees, they were a sect of Jews who insisted on strict observance of the law of Moses.

And in addition to the law of Moses, they insisted on strict observance to many other man-made traditions that helped them to keep the law of Moses. So they piled law upon law, regulation upon

regulation, rule upon rule.

And the reason they did this was because they were trying to preserve their national identity. They wanted to stay distinct as God's people. The Gentiles were unclean.

[9 : 40] Associating with Gentiles was associating with something that was unclean and it would erode the identity of God's people. And they thought that their identity of God's people, it was their, all these things that they were doing that established that, was the basis for their identity.

Obedying the law is what made them acceptable before God. And so when Jesus came, he was not popular with the Pharisees. They hated him. Because Jesus was not the Messiah they were looking for.

God had promised them a Messiah. God had promised them a king from the lineage of King David. And that's what they wanted. But they were expecting a political ruler. They wanted someone who would drive the Romans out, who would purify God's people.

But instead, Jesus came to suffer, to die. And after three days to be raised again to life. That was not what they were expecting. He wasn't interested in a political kingdom.

He told the Roman governor of Pilate, my kingdom is not of this world. Jesus was interested in the original mission of Israel. Jesus was interested in bringing salvation to a world that was in rebellion against God to rescuing them from their sinful way of life and rescuing them from the punishment that was due for their sin.

[11 : 01] Jesus wanted to rescue the world. So naturally, this message of salvation through Jesus, it went out into the world. It couldn't stay confined to Jerusalem. It went beyond the borders of the Jewish province.

It went out to the Gentiles. And many Jews who had been following Jesus, they didn't like that. They felt like this undermined their national identity.

They felt that this rush of new immigrants into God's kingdom undermined their desire to make Israel great again. So these Judaizers, they believe that male Gentile converts need to be circumcised.

Paul calls them the circumcision party. I don't want to go to a circumcision party personally. That's who they are.

They want to, I guess they want to hold a circumcision party in the church in Antioch. And they believe that the Gentiles, they need to be circumcised. They need to start following all of these ethnic regulations that are found in the law of Moses.

[12 : 08] They need to do all the things that a good Jew should do. In other words, they need, what they would say to you and to me today, who, those of us who are Gentiles, they would say, is that in order to be made right in the eyes of God, in order to be acceptable to Him, we will be made right when we follow the commandments that God gave us.

That is the basis for our relationship with God. They believe that what makes you and me a Christian is that we do Christian things. That's what makes us righteous before God.

We are justified on the basis of our works. We are justified on the basis of what we do on the basis of our performance or our pedigree. Here's how I would define justification by works.

Justification by works is the human actions through which holy and righteous human beings establish themselves to be acceptable before God on the basis of their own righteousness. The human actions through which holy and righteous human beings establish themselves to be acceptable before God on the basis of their own righteousness.

Now we see in verses 11-12 how the apostle Paul responds to this mindset because when even the apostle Peter begins to sort of give in to this way of thinking Paul says verse 11 I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

[13 : 40] And we'll learn why he stands condemned in a little bit. Paul is standing up against this false gospel that divides Jew from Gentile. And Paul is an example for us today.

You and I as Christians we are called to oppose the false gospel that feeds division justification by works. Oppose the false gospel that feeds division justification by works.

we see in this passage that Paul opposes this false gospel zealously and he opposes it publicly.

Now before we continue I want to sort of nip in the bud maybe maybe you have sort of I know folks like this and I'll admit there's maybe a little bit of this in me there's a certain rabble rousing streak in us that loves to see public confrontation you know take down the bad guy you know publicly expose something and we have this mindset let's let me nip that in the bud by saying that this sort of harsh

public correction this is not the usual way to correct a brother and sister in Christ.

If you're publicly confronting people over everything they do oh man the elders we're going to have to sit down and talk with you about that. We'll do it we'll do it in private. Okay but this is not normal for Paul.

[15:06] Paul does correct people he doesn't this is not like Paul does this all the time Paul doesn't use chemotherapy to treat the common cold. Right? Extreme but extreme circumstances require extreme measures Paul will use chemotherapy if there is cancer in the body of Christ.

And this false gospel it is a cancer. It is a cancer that is spreading rapidly through the church in Antioch. Look at verses 12 through 13. Before certain men came from James he that's Peter he was eating with the Gentiles and that's a big deal.

In the ancient world you know you just didn't eat together with anybody you ate together with people that you perceive that you associated with you wanted to associate yourself with. You would not eat together with people who you didn't want to be seen with.

So it was like you'd eat with family members you'd eat with people from your own clan from your own group but you wouldn't eat with somebody who is like totally from another clan from a whole other people group that was considered unclean.

Before certain men came from James Peter was eating with eating with the Gentiles. But when they came he drew back and separated himself fearing the circumcision party and the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

[16:32] Even Barnabas was led astray. Barnabas who was this champion of bringing the gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was the last man standing.

Paul was the last man standing and if he had given in to who knows we may not be sitting here today. You and I may never have heard the gospel. But in God's providence Paul was not led astray.

But it really is amazing how good and faithful men so easily fall into the trap of the false gospel that feeds division justification by works.

You know Peter if you read through the book of Acts in Acts chapter 10 you find that Peter he was the apostle to whom the Holy Spirit first revealed that Gentiles could be included in God's people without becoming Jews.

Peter was the first one to encounter this. he argued for this viewpoint among the elders of the Jerusalem church and as we saw Barnabas himself he was a big champion of this but even they fell into line when a group of influential men shows up.

[17:42] These are men who are close to James who at that time was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. Now James did not adopt this view as we find out in the book of Acts but a lot of these men close to James thought that way.

These Judaizers they arrive like cancer cells and the cancer of division is quickly spreading through the church in Antioch. Now why does this spread so rapidly?

It spreads rapidly because there's something about this that appeals to us. There's something about justification by works that really appeals to us isn't there? I've been involved in church leadership for several years for a number of years it never ceases to amaze me it never ceases to amaze me how the gospel of grace it can be preached from the pulpit week after week after week year after year after year as clear as crystal clear as can be and yet there are church goers who sit in these seats and listen every Sunday and they still don't get it.

It goes right over their heads. Maybe they buy they can buy into one of many many false gospels that boil down to justification by works.

Maybe they buy into the false gospel of formalism that says you're accepted by God because you come to church every Sunday and you serve in the ministries of the church that's what makes you a Christian.

[19:12] Maybe they buy into the false gospel of legalism which says you're accepted by God because you follow all the do's and don'ts that a good person does and doesn't. That's what makes you a Christian. Or maybe they buy into the false gospel of activism which says that you're accepted by God because you participate in good causes.

You participate in social justice and political action. That's what a good Christian does. Maybe they buy into the false gospel of pietism which says you are accepted by God because you read the Bible and you pray every day.

You become a Christian by reading the Bible and praying every day. or maybe because you have amazing emotional and spiritual experiences with God. That's what makes you a Christian. Or maybe they buy into the false gospel of I guess what I would call relationalism that says that you are accepted by God because you grew up in the right group of people because you came from a Christian family because you have been part of a church. And that's how you know you're a Christian. You're in the right group. It's sad that we can even buy into false gospels maybe a biblicism or a doctrinalism that says that because I know a lot about the Bible and because I can have extremely detailed and well thought out theology it is my ability to articulate my theology and my incredible biblical knowledge that makes me acceptable before God. [20 : 40] That's what makes me a Christian. and every one of these false gospels has at its root a dependence on me looking at myself assessing myself as being right in my own eyes.

I take this standard by which I am right in my own eyes it's funny we tend to pick the standards that we can pass don't we? And I then take that standard and I judge and assess other people to see if they also are right in my eyes.

I evaluate them to see whether they match my standard of righteousness. Some of them do.

They're my buddies. They're people like me they're Christians.

Some of them don't. Oh those ones maybe you can call them Christians. it is on the basis of their works that I consider them to be acceptable to God and acceptable to me.

Brothers and sisters this is why this cancer spreads so rapidly through the body of Christ. The cancer of the false gospel that feeds division justification by works.

[21 : 57] It spreads rapidly because we are born with this corrupted mindset. it is ingrained in our thinking and our culture and every culture on earth takes that mindset and it hardens it into place like it's wet concrete.

It hardens it into place. It encourages it. It promotes it. And we bring this mindset with us into the body of Christ. And you and I when we fail to oppose this false gospel when we fail to recognize that it is an uphill battle a continued fight to reject this false gospel if when we fail to do this to oppose it we serve as vectors for this disease that cripples and divides the body of Christ by splitting it into factions.

It divides the body of Christ into an us and a them. The us they are people like me who are accepted by God because they're good people like me.

the them they are people unlike me who are rejected by God because they're not good people like me. Here's what Paul says about you and me when we give in to this false gospel verse 14 their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.

In other words we say out loud sure I believe the gospel of grace I believe the gospel that Jesus Christ gave me but our conduct is not aligned with the gospel it's misaligned we're like a set of teeth it's all crooked and out of place and pointing every which way unable to do what teeth are supposed to do because they're not properly aligned the way that teeth are supposed to be.

[23 : 48] The way that we live our lives is not aligned with the gospel of grace that we say that we believe and that's why Paul says in verse 13 that Peter and his fellow Jews were acting hypocritically they were acting like hypocrites because they should be united to the Gentiles by the gospel of grace but instead they're dividing from the Gentiles because of the false gospel that feeds division justification by works so let's stop and think about this if this false gospel has such disastrous consequences for the church if this false gospel tears churches apart if it creates cliques if it leads us to become self-righteous hypocrites why do you and I keep slipping back into it why do we keep sliding back down that slope into the false gospel that feeds division I think it's because it feels right it feels just it's only fair that God would accept me or that God would reject me on the basis of my pedigree or on the basis of my performance as a believer another advantage that allows many good people I know many people who don't believe in Jesus would have allowed many of these

Judaizers fellow Jews to be saved on the basis of their human decency that good people all good people go to heaven justification by works these are just some of the siren songs that attract us that draw us that woo us into the false gospel that feeds division and they seem good and they seem nice and they seem to appeal to us but they lead to corruption and they lead to division in the body of Christ but through Paul God the Holy Spirit what he does is he removes all these tempting lures and he shows us that behind them there is a fish hook that is going to catch us by the jaws and snag us in and lead to our deaths Paul says this to Peter in verse 14 if you though a Jew live like a

Gentile and not like a Jew how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews so in other words here is what Paul is saying to Peter how can you go back to believing that you are saved on the basis of being a good Jew

Peter Peter you are probably one of the worst Jews I know Peter was not a very good Jew he was not very good at doing all the things the Pharisees said that you need to do to be a good Jew Peter was a rough around the edges fisherman he wasn't a full time Pharisee who could devote all his time to washing to washing up all these washings and all these things and washing dining couches and all the things that Pharisees did and that like normal people didn't have time for and didn't have the resources for Peter wasn't a very good Jew Paul of all people would know that Paul has the right to say that because he's an expert in what makes a good Jew if you just turn to the previous chapter chapter 1 verse 14 Paul says this I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers Paul was this paragon of what a good Jew should look like

Paul knew what a good Jew looked like and he knew Peter didn't measure up and so what he's saying is to Peter is this if you want to promote the false gospel of justification by works you're going to be hanged on your own gallows because Peter doesn't measure up to the law of Moses Peter's not a good enough Jew to be justified by works there's exactly one individual in all of history who is a good enough Jew to be justified by works that one man was Jesus of Nazareth that one man was the true Israel that one man was the son of God who perfectly obeyed his father nobody else in history nobody else today nobody else who will ever live in the future is ever going to be good enough to be justified by works you and I we are never going to be able to love

God enough we are never going to be able to love other people perfectly enough we will never measure up to the perfect and righteous law of a holy God only one man has ever done it Jesus Christ when we try to justify ourselves by works we put ourselves in the place of Jesus we try to be Jesus but you can't do it and this cancer of a false gospel it will end up killing us it will end up killing you and me and it will end up killing our church so Paul tells us what our one and only hope is in verses 15 and 16 we ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners you can just imagine the tongue in cheek way he writes that yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ so we also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law because by works of the law no one will be justified so here's what

[29 : 51] Paul is saying he's saying this if you're a Jew then yes you've got a superior pedigree to the Gentile Christian sitting next to you you come from a long lineage of people who've had a relationship of God stretching back 1500 years you come from the people of Israel you've been taught the law growing up you've got this background you've got this genealogy you have the pedigree and you probably have a superior performance to that Gentile as judged by the law of Moses you're just an all around better person by the judgment of the people around you so why did you put your faith in Christ that if you've got what it takes to be justified by works why did why why did Jesus even come why did

Jesus even have to die why did you run to him why did you throw yourself down at the foot of the cross pleading for salvation it's because your pedigree you knew that your pedigree and your performance were not good enough they were not good enough to justify you they were not good enough for God to look at you and say you're a righteous person you're right in my eyes you believed you put your faith in the only one the only person who's ever lived with a pedigree and a performance good enough to please God and so you were justified you were counted righteous by God on the basis of what Jesus Christ has done you are united with him you are counted righteous because of your faith because of your trust in him and it's not even the degree of faith that you have in Christ just simply having faith believing

Jesus Christ has done it all I believe he has done enough and more than enough to satisfy his father and my father his God and my God I believe that his crucifixion on a Roman cross satisfied the right wrath of God against sin I believe that all my sins are taken away by the blood of the lamb I believe that he rose again from the dead to new life and by my faith I am united I am part of God's family so all of my sins have been placed on Christ they have already been dealt with anything any punishment I ever deserved has been taken by Christ and all the righteousness I could have earned for myself could never have earned for myself Jesus earned and has been accounted on my behalf and now

I have new life and I am risen with Christ to new life and the Holy Spirit of God is in me working to renew me and to change me daily so Paul would say you though you are a Jew he would say to the Jews he would say this you are justified by faith in the same way that the Gentile Christian sitting next to you is also justified by faith you're both in the same boat you both have the same savior you both belong to God's people there is one God there is one mediator between God and man whether Jew or Gentile Christ is all and Christ is in all and you are brothers and sisters who share an equal standing in God's family in other words

Paul is calling us to promote the true gospel that starves division justification by faith promote the true gospel that starves division justification by faith it cuts off the blood flow to that tumor to that false gospel justification by works it starves out the division in the church it cuts off the blood flow to our self righteousness it says you your self righteousness gives you nothing it is because of Christ you have an equal standing with your brother and sister that phrase in verse 16 justified by faith in Christ there are some translators who think a better translation is justified by the faithfulness of Christ and I don't know if it makes a big difference because both are true statements we're justified on the basis of what Christ has done we're justified because we have faith in Christ we're justified because we believe that

[35 : 27] Christ in his faithfulness has obeyed the father the whole point of believing in Jesus Christ is because good people can't be saved good people cannot be saved because no one's good enough we have to trust Jesus Christ we have to believe that what he has done on our behalf is enough to please God that his faithfulness makes us welcome in God's family if you look inside your bulletin there's a section there's a theological vocabulary corner section that's in there there's printed a helpful definition of the true gospel that starves division justification by faith and this is something that's sort of modified from another source here's what justification by faith is it is the divine act so it is something that God does it is the divine act through which a holy and righteous

God declares sinful and condemned humans to be acceptable before him on the basis of the righteousness of his own son who stands in their place the divine act through which a holy and righteous God declares sinful and condemned humans to be acceptable before him on the basis of the righteousness of his own son who stands in their place this is the gospel of grace that overcomes division this is the gospel of grace that overcomes division God the Holy Spirit he is giving you and me two charges this morning the first charge is this oppose the false gospel that feeds division justification by works the second charge is this promote the true gospel that starves division justification by faith now how do we do that how do we actually put that into practice grace first we need to examine ourselves carefully you and

I we need to examine ourselves do you really believe the gospel of grace do you really buy into it do you really believe that we are saved from the punishment of divine judgment in hell do you really believe that we're welcomed into God's family because we believe in the faithful work of Jesus Christ on that basis and that basis alone or do you think that you're saved because you're a decent person who does the things that other people expect of you that first gospel that is the true gospel that starves division justification by faith the second gospel is the false gospel that feeds division justification by works the first thing that you and I need to do is we need to examine ourselves to confirm that we really do believe the gospel of grace that overcomes division the second thing that you and I need to do is we need to be reminded of the gospel of grace we need to be reminded of the gospel of grace now remember this gospel of grace runs contrary to what we were born believing this runs contrary to what our culture wants us to believe this runs contrary to what the devil wants us to believe so you and I we keep slipping back we keep sliding back down into the false gospel that feeds division so you know what we need we need to surround ourselves by people who will remind us of the true gospel that starves division we need people in our lives that the Holy

Spirit can work through to communicate the truth to us again and again do you meet regularly with other believers for the purpose of reminding yourself of these things are you getting together with your fellow believers sitting around you just to remind yourself of this truth I'm greatly blessed to be part of a growth group I'm greatly blessed to be in a group in which we study God's word together in which we remind one ourselves that we are justified because of what Jesus Christ has done for us let me put in a plug for that if you aren't part of a growth group please come see me after the service I'll help you find a growth group that you can be a part of that's the second thing that you and I need to be reminded of the gospel of grace third and finally you and I need to keep in step with the gospel

of grace you and I need to keep in step with the gospel of grace and in particular we need to from this passage in particular we need to welcome and to embrace others we embrace those who are outsiders who aren't believers because we were once there because they too can be saved by the gospel of grace no matter who they are no matter what they've done no matter their background and we need to welcome and embrace others in our church family maybe there are people sitting in this room that you are holding at arm's length if you believe that the people sitting near you have been justified by faith in Jesus

Christ just like you maybe you can put your money where your mouth is maybe you can invite them out for coffee maybe you can ask them to join you on your Sunday afternoon run maybe you can welcome them to your home for games or for dinner you can hold an awkward dinner party of your own for the sake of the gospel welcome into your life other people welcome into your life especially believers who are different from you you might be amazed at what you have in common because you have in common Jesus Christ thanks to the gospel of grace that overcomes division our God and our Father power is ■■ so