

Truth Worth Fighting For

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[0 : 00] If you haven't got a Bible in front of you, I'd encourage you to do that right now. Stick your hand up. Our hosts will come around and give you one to you. You need it in front of you. Galatians chapter 2 is where we're up to.

Last week we were in Galatians chapter 2. We're moving on a bit further. We saw in chapter 2 verses 4 and 5 last week that there were certain professing Jewish Christians from Jerusalem who tried to compel Titus, a Greek Christian, to be circumcised.

And the Apostle Paul refused to submit to this pressure. And the reason he gives in verse 5 is that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

That is, if Paul had given in for the demand for Titus to be circumcised under those circumstances, he would have torpedoed the truth of the gospel.

And if he torpedoed the truth of the gospel, the Gentile mission was over. Christ would have died in vain. And you and I, I'm assuming the majority of us here are Gentiles, would be still under the wrath of God for our sin.

[1 : 24] That's how crucial this little interaction was for Paul. Two centuries later, for us, and the impact for us two centuries later. What's this gospel that Paul saw was so necessary to fight for?

The gospel is the good news that the privilege of getting right with God was purchased fully when Jesus Christ died on a cross for our sins and rose again.

The gospel is the good news that the privilege of getting right with God, being justified before God, was purchased fully for us when Jesus Christ died on the cross for our sin and rose again.

And there is no other gospel. There's no other gospel. And the only way to enjoy this privilege is to put our trust in Jesus, the Son of God who loves us and gave himself for us.

Justification by faith in Christ and what he has done. And if you add any other requirements which encourage people to rely upon their own working or their own willing, you torpedo the gospel.

[2 : 43] It becomes nothing. If justification being right with God is not by faith, it's not by anything. And Paul took his stand on that point.

Titus will not be compelled to be circumcised. The truth of the gospel will be preserved.

Now we launch into verses 11 to 14. And the truth of the gospel is again at stake. And the venue shifted now from Jerusalem to Antioch, the place where the Gentile mission began.

And again, Gentiles are here being compelled to live like Jews. In Jerusalem, the issue was circumcision.

In Antioch, the issue is Jewish dietary laws. And in both cases, the gospel is at stake and Paul takes his stand. In Jerusalem, the truth of the gospel was at stake through the possibility of false teaching.

[3 : 50] In Antioch, the truth of the gospel is at stake because of false behavior, false living. It's Peter's behavior here that denies the truth of the gospel.

And so today, I don't want to focus so much on what the gospel is as much on how the gospel functions in our lives. So there's three things I want us to see.

Those of you taking notes, three things, put it down in your piece of paper. The heart of the gospel, the centrality of the gospel, and the power of the gospel. I see people running, grabbing for notes.

There's no photo you can take. Get a pen in front. The heart of the gospel, the centrality of the gospel, the power of the gospel. And the heart of the gospel we see in verses 15 and 16. We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 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 Jesus Christ that we may be justified by faith in Christ, not by the works of the law, because the works of the law, no one will be justified.

[5 : 02] That, those couple of verses there, is the reversal of the order you find in every other religion apart from Christianity.

To be justified there means to be right with God. And every other religion is it is through some effort on our behalf. There's always something that we must, some kind of divine law that must be obeyed, some sort of ceremonial observance in order for us to become pleasing in the eyes of some deity.

And Paul comes along and says, we're not put right with God through our effort. We're not put right with God through any form of obedience. We are justified by faith in Lord Jesus and only by faith in the Lord Jesus.

Now, this doesn't mean that Christians can live however they want. I mean, because Paul says in verse 17 that Christianity is not about promoting a life of sin. The issue here is getting the order right.

Last couple of weeks, we've been reading and hearing about this circumcision group that came down from Jerusalem. They are Jews who believe that Jesus was the Messiah.

[6 : 36] They had become Christians, but they still wanted to keep circumcision and Jewish dietary laws as a way to ensure that you were truly saved.

Completely saved. That was the problem. And here we have, in Galatians, and we see it clearly in these verses, a battle between two orders.

And the central issue is three steps in these two orders. The false teachers were saying, step one, believe in Jesus Christ. Step two, keep the law of God.

And step three, then you can be sure you're fully saved. Paul's gospel vindicated in Jerusalem, as we saw last week.

Step one, believe in the Lord Jesus. Step two, you are saved in that moment. And step three, you are now set free in order to obey God. You do, so it's a question I would pose to you now.

[7 : 52] Do you say, I will obey in order to be loved by God? Or do you say, I'm already loved by God in Jesus Christ, and therefore I'm set free to a life of obedience?

One is a religious order. The other is a gospel order. These are not two different arms of the same faith.

This is not two different denominations with slightly different emphasis. These are two orders. This is two different worlds.

This is two different religions that result into very different kinds of obediences. One is an anxious obedience because you never know whether you've actually done enough.

It's also selfish. It's a selfish obedience because the motive for doing every good thing is to get something from God. It's an obedience which is anxious, it's selfish, it's joyless, it's a burden.

[9 : 04] But what if you obey because you've already got everything as a gift? What if you've already gotten love and intimacy and a secure future and you've got acceptance?

What if you've already got that? And that's what the, that's a fundamental issue, the core issue of Christianity. It's in Jesus, the God of this universe who we get to call Father.

We're encouraged to call our Father. Father affirms us in a way that no earthly father can possibly affirm their children.

Always. In Jesus, we receive the praise of the praiseworthy. You are my much loved child.

Always. Always. And this is the God who says that, the God to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hidden.

[10 : 12] This is the God who says, you are my much loved child in Jesus Christ. Obedience that flows from that is totally different. The motivation would be joy, not anxiety.

The motivation wouldn't come from an empty heart. It comes from a full heart, an affirmed heart, a loved heart. Obedience is not selfish because I can love and give and serve for God's sake and my neighbour's sake and not for my sake.

It's radically different. See the difference in these two orders? Two different ways of living.

And notice verse 20 where it says, I have been crucified with Christ. 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.

See when you become a Christian, you put your faith in Jesus Christ and it says in verse 20 that you are crucified with Christ. The Bible also says that we are raised with Christ.

[11 : 25] What does that mean? It means that when you put your faith in Jesus Christ, you are united with Christ. You have a new life with Christ.

You see, God sees you free from all condemnation as if you were the one who died on the cross for your sins.

Your sins are paid for. But not only does Jesus take my sin, he also gives me his righteousness. On the cross, God treated Jesus as if he had done everything that I've done and you've done.

And when you put your faith in Jesus, God treats me as if I've done everything that Jesus has done. And now, the Christian lives knowing that God honors them like that.

two very different orders that create two very different lives. That's the heart of the gospel.

[12 : 45] That's how it impacts our life. Now let's see how it functions in our lives. Verses 11 to 13, let's go back to there. This is the centrality of the gospel.

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 his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray. This would have to be one of the most tense moments in the New Testament.

Here are two leading apostles, one head of reaching the Jews, one head of reaching the Gentiles, and face-to-face open conflict with each other.

So let me remind you of some of the back story that's going on here. Cephas, who we know as the Apostle Peter, was Jewish and the Jews had practiced for centuries a ceremonial law.

[14 : 02] You see it everywhere in the Old Testament. There were two aspects of Old Testament worship of God. One was the ceremonial laws about things that they could not eat, things that they couldn't wear, clothing that they weren't allowed to wear, things that they couldn't touch.

They had to stay ceremonially clean or they couldn't go and worship God on the Sabbath. And the Gentiles living around them didn't have those laws and didn't obey those laws and so they were regarded as unclean.

And it wasn't hard for Jews to consider themselves morally superior to all those unclean Gentiles.

And apart from those laws, there were also sacrificial laws. Animals were sacrificed to atone for the sin of the Jews. It was God's way of saying that no matter how hard you try with the ceremonial laws, no matter how hard you try to keep yourself clean, you're going to fail.

you'll never be good enough, you're never going to be clean enough and so there's going to need to be atonement for your sin. And Jesus comes along as Lord and Saviour.

[15 : 22] Number one, no need for sacrifices anymore because Jesus fulfilled them all with the sacrifice of himself on the cross at number two ceremonial laws. They all pointed to Jesus and his sacrifice and him through his sacrifice wiping away sin and making all people clean in him.

So only in Jesus can we be truly clean and acceptable in God's presence. Now the twelve apostles were Jews and so it was pretty hard for them in this.

Jesus was however pretty explicit. Mark chapter 7 where he told them that in him they were clean, they didn't need the dietary laws but it was still hard.

All of their lives they had regarded themselves as the clean ones and the Gentiles as the unclean ones. It was hard for them to eat with Gentiles and yet Peter himself had heard this teaching from Jesus' lips and also in Acts chapter 10 and 11 Peter gave this massively vivid vision to show him to show him that there was no longer any racial divisions and all food was clean and that he should eat with Gentiles in which case he immediately does with Cornelius.

He goes into the house of Cornelius who's a filthy Gentile. And in fact in verse 12 here we notice that Peter did eat with the Gentiles and then something happened.

[16 : 59] Peter withdrew from the Gentile Christians not because of theological conviction. He hadn't changed his views.

the issue here according to verse 13 is hypocrisy. He hadn't changed his mind hadn't changed his convictions he changed his behaviour.

It didn't align with his theological convictions. See Paul here is not saying Peter that's a little bit rude. he's actually saying your behaviour is hypocritical.

What caused it? He feared criticism from a small but powerful pressure group that had come from Jerusalem to Antioch.

And Paul sees something deeper here than simple table manners or rudeness. He calls it not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.

[18:10] Your behaviour is undermining the gospel. See verse 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 and 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 sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ.

You see Peter and Barnabas here and others with them went back into attitudes of racial superiority and exclusivity that the Jews historically held over Gentiles and Paul says Peter you're not living in line with the truth of the gospel and the word that Paul uses here in the original language is orthopadio orthopadio it's where we get the English word orthopedics Peter you are not straight walking with the gospel you're diverting in your life away from the truth of the gospel you're not straight walking the truth of the gospel had not shaped this particular area of Peter's life he was too concerned about the approval of a powerful minority group he had it in his head it wasn't in his heart now it's essential for us to see here the magnitude of what

Paul is saying he's saying that the gospel is truth it is a message with a set of claims it includes facts that need to be embraced and believed but secondly and just as crucial the gospel truth has a vast number of implications for our lives everything in life must be brought in line with the truth of the gospel and Paul looks at Peter an apostle who frankly is more advanced in the Christian faith than anyone in this room and tells him Peter you've forgotten the gospel now if Peter needs to hear it we need to hear it he was not walking in line with the truth of gospel it was

Paul's way of saying you are not applying the implications of the gospel in the way that you are treating people of other races and also the implication of the gospel in your fear of this pressure group how dare you fear them what do you care about their affirmation of you you've got a greater affirmation now there are some beliefs that are foundational beliefs we might want to call those beliefs world views they are beliefs that profoundly impact how we view our interactions with this world and with other people and the gospel is one of those world view defining beliefs in fact for the Christian it is the world view defining belief the gospel impacts everything everything in your life the way we do our work the plans that we have for our career is shaped by the gospel including do I take that promotion or not massive implications for that the way you think about those sorts of issues in our society of course we do it's more money of course we're going to take it not for the gospel shaped person the way we spend our money is shaped by the gospel our relationships our family shaped by the gospel our sexuality is shaped by the gospel our attitude to the poor the needy the vulnerable is shaped by the gospel the way we handle conflict is shaped by the gospel the way we treat people who think differently even about same-sex marriage is shaped by the gospel the truth of the gospel goes everywhere in life there's not a corner it does not touch and it does not reform does not inform and does not shape it is the framework by which the

Christian sees and evaluates everything and notice what happens here Paul doesn't say to Peter Peter you've broken the racism rule he could have legitimately said that he could have jumped out a bunch of Bible verses and racism is wrong stop it Peter you've been racist that may in that moment it may have restrained Peter's will and his behaviour but it wouldn't have transformed his heart he doesn't do it he certainly wants Peter to stop it but instead what he does is in order to get Peter to stop it he chases his heart he chases Peter's heart you say you believe the gospel it's in your mind Peter but has it changed your heart you see the shared core value of all humanity is that we want to be valued we want to know that our lives matter we have a desperate hunger to feel a sense of worthiness and for some of us on father's day we might be feeling that our fathers didn't give us that and the main reason is because we fear that we don't matter that we have a worthlessness and it's why we consistently turn to places and things that give us that sense of value we can do it in a multitude of ways for some of us it's education romance the need to have a romantic relationship family in every case we are attempting to justify ourselves we're trying to show ourselves that [24:45] I matter and Peter makes the mistake here of doing that his Jewishness is biggest is his biggest identity marker in this moment something other than the gospel of Jesus Christ is his new identity here it's his biggest thing it's the thing that makes him feel like he matters and it's a daily temptation for us all including us as a church every single Christian group and denomination or denomination necessarily has many distinctive beliefs and practices that have less to do with core gospel beliefs and more to do with specific convictions about ethical behavior or church policy and

politics and we don't walk in line with the gospel when we stress our distinctions in those things in order to demonstrate to ourselves or others that our church or our particular group is superior or the best one another way we do it is by practicing classist nationalistic or racist attitudes working class Christians may have a distaste for Christians from wealthier or more socially refined backgrounds and vice versa Christians from one political persuasion may be upset by those from another end of the spectrum very talented Christians may feel unhappy that people they consider mediocre are treated as equal parts with them in the church those who have been around the longest and contributed the most feel superior to those who have just entered the door for the first time socially polished Christians feel uncomfortable around people who are socially awkward or marginal and vice versa we may respond to all this in exactly the same way that Peter has here in apparent well mannered and polite ways where he's just gradually pulled back and it's not true fellowship and unity we politely might even sit near people in church but we don't eat with them we don't fellowship with them we don't really become friends with them we don't socialize with them we don't share our lives with them our homes with our possessions with them we keep our relationships formal and see people and see people and none of it is in line with the gospel none of it is walking straight with the gospel without the gospel our hearts have to manufacture self esteem by comparing the group I belong to with all other groups and naturally whichever group I belong to is the most superior group I'm using the word I there you know for all of us not me personally but the gospel tells us we are all unclean without Christ and in Christ all clean we not only don't have the right to feel superior to anyone else in the gospel we don't have the need for it either the gospel is all we need the gospel is the only form of worth and value that's not achieved it is received it doesn't go up and down based on my performance in the last week or the last month the gospel is the end of every struggle in this matter the gospel is the center of the Christian faith it is the center of our lives the gospel must not just be something that we wrestle with in our minds it's something that must sit firmly in our hearts and change our affections our heart and my heart needs is thinking about the gospel praying about the gospel rejoicing in the gospel singing about the gospel and doing that in every area of our lives and right down to the very depths of our being the image

I have here is a snack food you know like a vending machine you know a Coke drink machine thing and you put a coin I've had this happen it's very annoying put a coin in and it disappears but you don't hear the clunk where it's actually useful for you and I don't know you kick the thing and whack it you try to get the coin so you can get the drink you just paid for or a chocolate bar and you desperately wanting this thing that's the image I have here the coin needs to go in not just here it needs to go clunk the gospel needs to not just come in here the gospel needs to go clunk that's when you get the goods has my this is unfortunate

I think but I think the coin hasn't dropped for so many people sitting in so many churches the gospel sits in our heads as a set of propositions that must be defended but it needs to drop into our hearts and transform our lives if the gospel is at the center of your life that's my question is the gospel at the center of your life in such a way that you are orthopedio walking straight with the gospel well that's the heart of the gospel center of the gospel now the power of the gospel verse 20 I have been crucified with

[31 : 42] 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 see there's a weird paradox in these verses I no longer live but Christ lives in me he says I don't live because Christ does and then he says the life I now live seems like a contradiction I no longer live and the life I now live and Christian the old life is gone it is hidden in Christ it has disappeared Jesus becomes our worth our value but at the same time we live the same life but now out of gratitude to him and the gospel has the power to change the motivations of your heart it changes your personal identity it changes your social identity it changes every identity about you as a church our vision is not to conform people to certain moral standards even biblical moral standards our vision is not to constrain people's actions in this church or outside this church in society our vision is for hearts to be changed by the power of the gospel as

Paul went after Peter's heart our vision is to go after hearts if people can see the worth and the value of the Lord Jesus and the worth and the value he gives us in the gospel it changes everything in life this is our passion at St.

Paul's this is our motivation to God's God's word it our attitude to leadership.

It changes our attitude to even ourselves and our own hearts. And in that sense, when that happens, we become truly transcultural when that happens.

A church that exists, that reflects, that embraces, that enjoys a rich cultural diversity and yet because of the power of the gospel, we rise above all of those things, our Jewishness, our gentleness and whatever else you want to attach to that and we form a new community in Christ with a new set of gospel-shaped values that we're pursuing because we are his much-loved children.

[34 : 59] That's what it means to be transcultural. That's our vision. It is worth us remembering as we close up that Paul is speaking still in this moment to Peter, the great apostle Peter.

We are not above receiving this rebuke from Paul ourselves. Paul finishes by reminding Peter here that the whole of the Christian life is about living in line with the gospel in all areas of your life for the whole of your lives.

We must continue on as Christians as we started as Christians, as we begin by the gospel of grace, so we continue with the gospel of grace and so we finish with the gospel of grace.

As Paul affirms here in verse 21, Do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness could be attained through the law, Christ died for nothing.

There is no other gospel. You can't add to it. You add, you nullify it. It becomes nothing. Jesus Christ either does everything for you or he does nothing for you.

[36 : 21] We cannot combine our merit and his grace and end up with a better product, a better righteousness. If our right standing before God is in any way contributed to by our merit, then Jesus' death is meaningless in history and it's meaningless for you personally right now.

And yet when we look down on other people, we're adding to it. We're adding to it. It's coming from a heart that says, I'm superior.

It's not coming from the gospel. It's coming from a heart that says, I'm superior. Let me just drive this home for you.

We can't contribute anything. Imagine for a moment that your house was on fire but your whole family managed to escape and you're on the front yard and I come over.

I come running over to see what I could do and you're all on the front yard. Your dog, your cat, you've got goldfish out and everything. You're all on the front yard. You're all safe. And I say to you, let me show you how much I love you.

[37 : 40] And I run into the house and I die. And you would go, well, that was weird. That's tragic.

That's stupid. What a pointless waste of life. Imagine your house was on fire and you're trapped inside and I call, I come running over and I call out, let me show you how much I love you.

And I run in and I rescue you. I managed to save the whole family, the cat, the goldfish, everything, but I perished myself. You would think that was true life.

That was true love to give his life for us. If we could get ourselves on the front lawn, if we could save ourselves in any measure whatsoever, Christ died for nothing.

It was pointless. It means nothing. If on the other hand, we realize that we cannot save ourselves, his death means everything.

[38 : 59] It means so much that we will spend the rest of our lives for the one who has given himself for us in joyful service of him, bringing our whole lives into line with his precious gospel, or for patio, straight walking with him.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.