

Living by Faith

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me again to the book of Galatians chapter 2. That's page 914 in the Pew Bible. We are going to be considering verses 17 through 21 in detail today.

! But for context, I'm going to read starting back in verse 11 so we can get the sweep of Paul's argument here. So that's Galatians chapter 2 starting in verse 11, and then I'll read to the end of the chapter.

Let me pray for us as we come to God's Word. Father, we ask that you would bless now the reading and the teaching of your Word.

Lord, would the words of my mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts be pleasing in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. We pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen.

All right, Galatians 2, 11 through 21. But when Cephas, that is Peter, came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned.

[1 : 03] 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? 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. But if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not.

For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law, I died to the law so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave Himself for me. I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. All right, so in verses 17 through 21, this last paragraph of chapter 2, Paul is answering one of the main objections to the gospel.

And this is an objection I'm wondering if you too might be feeling at this point in our study of this book of Galatians. It's an objection most people feel when they really start to understand the gospel. In fact, some have even suggested that if you don't feel the weight of this objection yourself, if you don't start to ask this question in your mind, then maybe you don't quite see just how radical the gospel message truly is. So what is this objection? Well, Paul lays it out in verse 17.

He says, but if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Or we might say, does trusting in Christ alone for salvation mean that we can live however we want? After all, Paul has just reminded Peter in verses 15 through 16 that even they themselves as Jews who are not Gentile sinners, that they too have come to trust in Christ alone in order to be declared in the right to be justified by God. Why? Because works of the law cannot justify anyone. So what does that mean about Peter and Paul as Jews? What does it mean about all their law keeping, all of their Torah observance? Surely it must count for something, right? But no. As Paul says in verse 17, he says, we too were found to be sinners, just like the Gentiles who didn't keep the law.

[4 : 54] In other words, Paul and Peter, even though they had done their best to keep the law, in Christ they now see that they're no better off than the Gentiles when it comes to being righteous before God. Their law keeping, their Torah observance contributes nothing to the basis of their justification. Their righteousness is found totally and completely in Jesus, the Messiah.

But here's where the objection comes in. If we are justified by faith in Christ alone, then that means our works contribute nothing to the basis of our standing before God.

But if our works contribute nothing to our justification, then won't that just lead people to live lives of total moral indifference? Aren't we just giving people a free ticket to selfishness and self-indulgence? Aren't we making Christ a servant of sin?

It's very interesting that the word servant here is the Greek word diakonos, which is where we get the word deacon from, right? It literally means someone who waits on tables. It's a table servant in the ancient world. So, Paul's saying something like, is Christ just serving up sin on a platter?

You're justified by grace through faith in Christ. Your works don't add a thing, so here you go. Have a giant steak of sin. Enjoy it. Or if you're a vegan, you can have the sin salad. No one's going to judge you here because it doesn't matter what you do. So, this is the objection Paul was confronting.

[6 : 41] And it's one of the main objections that the gospel will always face in every age, the objection that a gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone apart from works of the law, the objection is that it just inevitably leads to antinomianism. In other words, it will just make people think that they have a license to sin. It will shut down any concern people have for living truly moral lives. So, the objection goes on to say justification then can't be by faith alone.

It must also be by our works. We have to keep the works of the law in some kind of central place, right? I mean, the objection goes, surely our works must provide some basis for our justification, right? Right? So, how does Paul respond to this objection? Well, he actually has three things to say in response. And, you know, this paragraph here and what we talked about last week, this is really the thesis of Paul's whole letter of Galatians. And if you feel like things move at about a hundred miles an hour in this part of Galatians, that's okay because Paul's going to unpack this in the rest of the letter. This is where he just lays it all out and then he's going to unfold it as we go.

But tightly packed in here, Paul has three things very tightly to say in response to this objection. In fact, he's going to argue that this sort of objection to the gospel actually suffers from a deep misunderstanding of three things. In short, Paul's going to say, if you think that you have to put works of the law back into your justification in order to uphold moral living, then you don't truly understand the law, and you don't truly understand faith, and you definitely don't understand the cross. So let's look at each one of those. First, Paul says, you don't truly understand the law. More specifically, you don't understand the purpose of the law. Look again at verse 18.

Paul says, if I rebuild what I tore down, what's he talking about here? Well, most likely he's talking about the law of Moses. There's a nice parallel passage in Ephesians 2 where Paul talks about a dividing wall that has come crashing down in Christ, not just a wall that divided sinful humans from God, but a wall that divided Jews from Gentiles. Jews who had the law of Moses, who lived within God's covenant promises, and Gentiles who were alienated from the commonwealth of Israel and strangers to the covenants of promise, having no hope and without God in the world. In Christ, Paul says, this wall that divided them has come down, and the two have become one. So the law of Moses now no longer defines the people of God. It's not what reconciles us together to God.

Its function has ceased. Christ has brought the law of Moses to its climax, to its fulfillment, and begun a new era of salvation history. But in verse 18 here, Paul says, well, let's say I do what these agitators in Galatia are recommending. Let's say we rebuild the law of Moses. Let's build it back up. Put that wall back in place.

[10 : 09] What do we achieve? Well, Paul says, here's what we achieve. If I rebuild what I tore down, I just prove myself to be a transgressor.

What is the true function and real purpose of the Mosaic law? Does the law make us holy?

Does the law make us morally upright people? Does the law give us the ability to stop sinning? No, Paul says. The law doesn't have the power to do any of those things. Here's what the law really does.

It proves that we are transgressors. It shows us that we're sinners. Yes, the moral law shows us something of God's character, and it shows us how as humans we ought to live. But in showing us how we ought to live, we see how far we fall short. So, if you think that you need to put the works of the law back into justification, think again, Paul says. But a law can't make you good.

It will only show you how much you need a Savior. And Paul presses that point even deeper in verse 19. He says, for through the law, I died to the law so that I might live to God. When Paul says, I died to the law, he means that he died to the law as the basis of his justification. He died to

law-keeping, to Torah observance as a way of securing a righteous verdict before God.

[11 : 54] And how did that come about? Paul says that he died to the law through the law itself. If you take the law seriously, you begin to realize that sinful humans cannot keep it.

The false teachers in Galatia were really big on circumcision, right? They were probably also pretty big on the food laws, most likely on Sabbath observance too. It seems that they stressed the outward markers of the Mosaic law. But Paul says later in this letter that, look, if you accept circumcision on those terms as your righteousness before God, you have to keep the whole law in order to be righteous. You can't pick and choose. You can't just pick the bits of the law you think you can keep and then say, look, I'm justifying myself, and then ignore the rest. No, Paul says, when you really feel the weight of the law's demands, when you really see that God requires perfect righteousness, then you start to see that human law-keeping can never be a means of salvation. through the law. I died to the law, Paul says. But then surprisingly, he adds, so that I might live to God.

You see, it's only when Paul stopped trying to justify himself through the works of the law that he finally and truly began to live for God.

Do you see what he's saying here? He's saying, who was I really living for when I was thinking that my own Torah observance would gain me a righteous verdict from God's throne? Who was I living for when I thought that I could construct my own righteousness through these observances? Who was I living for? For God?

[13 : 53] No! He was living for himself. This obedience wasn't really done for God. It was done to get something from God. You see, here's the great irony. If we think we have to put the law back into our justification in order to preserve moral living, we accomplish the very opposite.

It doesn't make us live for God more. It makes us live for God less. People are not fun and all-around not fun people. Why?

Because if we don't get the gospel of grace, we're living for ourselves. We're working really hard to keep ourselves looking good so that our sense of self doesn't collapse.

But of course, it's not just religious people who do this, right? Everybody does this. Everybody does it. If my works are the basis of my identity and my life, right, if I'm looking at something I am or I do or I've constructed to be my identity, to be my life, to be my righteousness, then I'm inevitably going to be proud when I'm doing good.

Look at me. Or I'm going to be depressed when I'm not doing good. Woe is me. And nearly all of the time, I'm going to be deeply hypocritical.

[15 : 30] Why? Because I have to pick and choose. I have to pick and choose. The fallen human heart knows that it can't possibly be completely moral, completely righteous.

So we pick something we're good at, make that the really important thing, and then downplay or disregard the rest. And then, because I may be naturally inclined to be a little bit better in this one area, I cast myself as the morally superior one.

I've got it all together. But if you were to look at my whole life, you'd see that I'm not better than anyone else. In fact, I don't even live up to my own standards, let alone God's.

Friend, do you really want to live? Do you want to really live?

To live not for yourself, but for God. To live free of hypocrisy and self-centeredness and the endless circles of pride and self-loathing that come when you base your identity on your own performance?

[16 : 45] If you really want to live, then you have to die to the law. You have to die to the idea that your law-keeping will put you right with God and make you acceptable to Him.

You have to die to the idea that your identity can be founded on anything in you. That's the first misunderstanding that Paul clears up.

The purpose of the law. We see the second one in verse 20. Now remember, Paul's responding to the objection that the gospel of justification by faith alone in Christ alone will make people morally lazy.

It'll give them a license to sin. That's what he's responding to. But this objection isn't just working with a faulty view of the law. It also deeply misunderstands the nature of faith.

So in verse 20, Paul goes on to say, if you think you have to put works of the law back into your justification in order to uphold moral living, not only do you not understand the true purpose of the law, you also don't understand the transforming power of faith.

[17 : 56] You don't understand the transforming power of faith. Look again at verse 20. Paul says, I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

You see, when someone truly comes to understand who Jesus is and what Jesus has done, when they realize that they can't save themselves and that they're dead before the law, when they repent and turn from trusting in their own self and their own goodness and their own moral efforts, when they repent of all the things they made their identity, and when they place their faith in the crucified and risen Lord Jesus, that is when they trust Him and Him alone for righteousness, life, and salvation, when that happens, they are no longer the same old person.

They are united to Christ. Their old self dies with Christ in His crucifixion. Their new self rises with Christ in His resurrection.

That's why, by the way, the very first public act of faith for a Christian, their very first public act is to publicly identify with Christ and His church through what?

[19 : 44] Baptism. Why baptism? Why is that the first public act of faith? Because baptism is symbolic of when a believer, when they go underwater and come back up again, it's symbolic that they've died and risen with Christ.

The old eye, the eye that wanted to build its own righteousness, the eye that put its identity in its own record, its own accomplishments, the eye that thought God would owe it something if it kept its end of the bargain.

That eye was crucified with Christ. That eye no longer lives. That eye actually deserved to die. It deserved to be put in the grave. And united to Christ by faith, it has died, and it is left in the grave. But even though that eye has died, crucified with Christ, sentenced, condemned, buried, even though that eye is now dead, there's a new eye.

Paul goes on to say, the life I now live in the flesh, a new eye has risen. And how does this new eye live?

[21 : 03] Does it live for itself anymore? Does it live for sin? Does it thrash about trying to find a secure spot to place its identity in family, or in sports, or in academics, or in career, or in moral performance?

What is this new eye? How does this new eye live its life? What fuels it? What sustains it? What secures it? The life I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

You see, a Christian is someone who is in a vital, relational union of trust with the risen Lord Jesus. There's a whole new center to your life, and that center is not a thing, and it's not an object, and it's not a job, and it's not a project, and it's not an aspiration.

It's not a series of good deeds done or undone. No, the new center of your life is a person. And what of this person? Who is he?

[22 : 23] He's the very Son of God. God from God, light from light, the eternal Son of the Father, become flesh for us, Israel's Messiah, the world's true Lord.

And what has this Son of God done? He loved me and gave himself for me. His self-donation in love, his self-giving on the cross, that was for you.

How stupid it is to think that someone can say, the Son of God loved me and gave himself for me, and then say, if you believe that, you're just going to go out and sin.

That is the stupidest line of reasoning of all time. You don't understand the gospel at all. You don't understand what it means to say, the Son of God loved me, loved me in all my sin and in all my selfishness, in all my rightly deserved condemnation and death, loved me and gave himself for me. Gave himself. No one forced him. No one demanded that he do it. Jesus gave himself freely, generously, willingly, eagerly.

[23 : 51] He gave himself for me, for you. On the cross, it was for you, for your sin, for your condemnation, for your death, for your hell.

That's who I am united to in faith, the King of love, who died my death and bore my curse and suffered my hell so that I can live and live forever, so that I can share his righteousness, life, and eternal joy now and forever.

You see, in faith, we flee to Christ and are united to him so that we can be done with sin, so that we can be done with the old nature, so that we can be done with the old present evil age, as Paul says

in the opening of this book.

We go to Christ in union with him so that we can be done with sin. Think of it this way. Why do you go, why do you go to an oncologist?

You go to an oncologist so that you can be done with cancer, right? And no one who is done with cancer says, you know, what am I going to do today?

[25 : 14] I'm going to go out and get me some more cancer. Just so. Friends, when we flee to Christ, we do so because we want to be done with sin and so that we can live in his love.

And that is exactly what happens. The old self that loves sin is crucified with him. And the new self that is fueled by his love is raised with him.

Now, of course, as Christians, we will continue to be tempted by sin, right? We will even at times give in to that temptation of sin. But united to Christ, we no longer love sin.

It's lost its taste. And united to Christ, we now have the power, the power that the law could never give us to turn from sin and walk more and more in holiness.

And what is that power? Is it the power of a demand, do this or else? No. Paul says it's the power of his love.

[26 : 32] He loved me and gave himself for me. When that truth becomes real to your heart, when the Holy Spirit awakens your faith to that reality, sin loses its power.

And the heart longs to live no longer for itself, but for God. There's one more understanding that Paul addresses here.

Not just about the purpose of the law or the power of faith, but lastly, it's about the magnitude of the cross. The magnitude of the cross. Look again with me at verse 21.

Paul says, I do not nullify the grace of God. Apparently, there were people accusing Paul in preaching justification by faith alone of nullifying God's grace, of making God's grace meaningless in their life.

But Paul says, I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness, that is justification, if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

[27 : 39] You know, it's very easy to believe in a version of Christianity or so-called Christianity that goes something like this. God does His part. God provides you with some grace.

God provides you with some fresh start. He even puts His Spirit in you. But if you want to be justified, if you want to maintain that friendship with God, then you have to do your part.

You have to cooperate with this grace. You have to get to work alongside this grace. You have to live a righteous life. And on the basis of that life that you live, on the righteousness you perform, through your effort in concert with God's grace, grace, then God will justify you.

Maybe, if you've cooperated enough. But in the face of all such thinking, the Bible holds up the cross of Jesus Christ.

If God could save you by giving you some grace so that through your law-keeping you could justify yourself, if God could just give you a push, give you a boost, so that you could then become the forger of your own righteousness, if all that were possible, Paul simply says, then why did the Son of God need to be crucified?

[29 : 10] If the law was enough, why did He have to die? In fact, if the law was enough, then His gruesome death on a Roman cross was utterly pointless.

It was gratuitous violence. Nothing else. But when you see the magnitude of the cross, when you, it is then, when you see the magnitude of the cross, then you realize that law-keeping of any kind, whether that pure sort of Pelagian legalism or some sort of semi-Pelagian cooperation, that could never be the basis of our justification.

any such thinking is an offense to the cost and the achievement of the cross. At the cross, the curse of sin was dealt out in full so that the blessing of righteousness might be given in full to all who turn and trust in Christ.

No cooperation necessary. Now, do good works flow from our union with Christ? Of course, yes. That's what Galatians 2.20 is all about.

But will those good works be the basis of your justification before God? No! The cross of Christ has already won your verdict. Your sins have been condemned and by the righteousness of Jesus with whom you are united by faith, you've been pronounced, accepted, loved, and righteous forevermore.

[31 : 05] Do you see what justification is? Justification is the verdict of the end come crashing into the present and pronounced over your life now.

When God, the judge of all things pronounces His judgment, what will that verdict be over your life? Paul says you can know what that verdict is right now because justification means it comes in now into the present and says what if you're in Christ?

You're forgiven and you're mine and you're righteous. Friend, do you see the magnitude of the cross of Christ?

It cleanses every sin. It silences every accusation. It fulfills every precept of the law. It ends the age of sin and death.

It inaugurates the new creation. Now to live as if that's true.

[32 : 16] That's our task. Don't go back to the law as if you needed to complete something of what Christ has already finished as if you needed to now somehow save yourself.

No! Christ has died. Christ has risen. Now Paul says go forward. Go forward. Go forward as people of the new creation that you are.

Go forward in love. Go forward, yes, and fulfill God's commands. Not because you need to save yourself but because Christ has already saved you and loved you and freed you from sin.

Run in the path of His commands because He set your heart free. love because He first loved you and gave Himself for you. You are justified totally and freely by His self-giving love through faith alone.

Is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not, Paul says. Certainly not. Let's pray.

[33 : 24] Father, we take just a moment and pause before You.

Lord, our lives are very busy. They're full of distraction and worries and cares. But in this moment as we sit before the magnitude of the cross and the deep mysterious wonder and joy of our union with You, O Lord, help us again to experience the goodness of these things, the power of these things, the joy of these things.

Lord, for those who've been contemplating You and contemplating the gospel but not sure yet where they stand with You, Holy Spirit, open their eyes to what is true here that Christ, the Son of God, loved me and gave Himself for me.

Would that great affirmation rise in the hearts of all of us here this morning and help us to live lives of new creation, joy, and holiness as a result.

Amen. Amen.