

Keeping the Gospel Pure

Scripture: Galatians 2:13–21

Code: 48-10

We come now to the study of God's precious Word and the second chapter of Galatians, Galatians chapter 2. We're working our way through this letter to the region of Galatia where Paul had planted a number of churches by preaching the gospel. This is the first of thirteen letters that Paul wrote that are included in the New Testament, and the purpose of this letter is to make crystal clear what the gospel really is.

Satan always tries to counterfeit everything. He appears disguised as an angel of light. His ministers are disguised as angels of light. They masquerade within the people of God, and among the people of God, and in the church, subtly proclaiming error. And any deviation of the gospel is a cursed thing.

Back in chapter 1, verses 8 and 9, Paul says, "If anybody preaches another gospel than the gospel that I have preached to you, let him be *anathema*, cursed, damned!" Paul's concern in writing this letter, according to chapter 2, verse 5, at the end of the verse is "so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you." He's concerned about the truth of the gospel, because the gospel, the good news of salvation is clearly defined in Scripture as the only way people can escape hell. We have to get the gospel right.

So Satan works overtime to spread wrong representations of the gospel. He operates not only outside the Christian church with anti-Christian religion, but inside the church in much more subtle ways, with corrupt forms of the gospel and false teachers who identify themselves as believers in Jesus Christ.

Paul was the apostle of the gospel. There is no New Testament when Paul writes. The gospel basically is being communicated by this man and those who are traveling with him, and the other apostles. Peter was a preacher of the true gospel. His preaching dominates the first half of the book of Acts, which is the record of the early preaching of the gospel. Paul comes in to preach in the twelfth chapter and fills the rest of the book of Acts all the way to chapter 28. The gospel resides in these men until it is eventually written down in the New Testament by the apostles and those who were their associates.

It is imperative then that people believe Paul. False teachers had come into Galatia, as they always did, following the work of Paul, and brought in a false gospel. The true gospel was clear. The people in Galatia, in the cities of Galatia where churches had been established, believed the true gospel. But in came false teachers with another gospel, which is no gospel, who would have been accursed by God for preaching a deviant gospel. And they basically said, "The gospel that Paul preached is not true. Salvation is not by faith alone; you must also follow the traditions, and the customs, and the ceremonies, and the circumcision of Moses."

They were Jews purporting to believe in Christ, to believe in His death and resurrection, accept Him as Messiah and Savior. But His work was not sufficient, and believing in Him was not sufficient. If

you were to be saved as a Gentile, you needed to be circumcised, and follow the patterns of Mosaic law.

Paul writes Galatians to defend the true gospel, and he does that in chapters 3 and 4. In chapters 1 and 2, he defends his apostleship, because if they don't believe him, then there's no source for the true gospel. He is the apostle to the Gentiles. He is the one proclaiming the true gospel.

The false teachers, called Judaizers for wanting to turn Gentiles into some form of Jews by forcing them to adhere to Mosaic law, the Judaizers claim that Paul is a false apostle because he does not include the Mosaic prescriptions. So before he can define the gospel in clear terms – which he does in chapters 3 and 4; he actually begins at the end of chapter 2 as we'll see – he has to defend his apostleship. And so he begins in chapters 1 and 2 with a defense of the fact that he was appointed by God, personally called by Christ, and then trained by Christ for three years in the desert called the Nabataean Arabia. He was not any different, any less than all the other original apostles.

To be an apostle you had to see the risen Christ. He saw Him on the Damascus Road, and several times subsequently. To be a true apostle you had to be commissioned by Christ. On that occasion on the Damascus Road to Acts chapter 9, he was directly commissioned by Christ. In order to be a true apostle, you had to have been taught by Christ. The original apostles spent three years with Christ; He taught them for three years. So He took Paul by himself into Nabataean Arabia for three years, and Jesus taught him. He was a class of one.

Early in chapter 1, he defends his apostleship based on his personal calling by Christ, based upon his personal teaching that Christ had given to him. He says, "I didn't learn the gospel from men. I was not taught by men. I didn't learn it from the apostles in Jerusalem. I was directly taught by Christ Himself." This is the initial credential of his true apostleship.

And then in chapter 2, he says, "After a period of fourteen years, I finally did go to Jerusalem and sit with the apostles. Three years in the wilderness, fourteen more years, totally seventeen before I went to Jerusalem. I didn't learn this from the apostles. I didn't get this from men. Fourteen years later, after I came back from being trained by Christ personally for three years, I went to Jerusalem; and when I got there, I gave them the gospel that Christ had given to me and that I'd been preaching for fourteen years in the Gentile world, and they affirmed that it was the true gospel."

And according to verse 9, "James," – the brother of our Lord, the head of the church – "Cephas," – who is Peter – "and John" – the apostles – "gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." In other words, "The act of solidarity. 'You're preaching the true gospel. Go to the Gentiles.'"

So he says, "I am an apostle, because God chose me, and Christ called me. I am a true apostle, because I was trained personally by Christ for three years. I am an apostle, because my message was validated by the apostles, and the leading ones: James, the leader of the church; and the two apostles, Peter and John."

Then he comes to the third defense of his apostleship: his confrontation of Peter. We'll pick it up in verse 11. "But when Cephas" – that's the Aramaic for the word "Peter," named Peter. "When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face." At this time, Paul was pastoring a church in Antioch along with Barnabas and some other men. Peter had come there to visit them, and stayed quite a

long time.

“But when Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.” Now there is sort of the pinnacle evidence of his genuine apostleship; he literally condemns the leading apostle. Nobody questioned Peter’s apostleship. But Paul condemns him, opposing him to the face. Why? “For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.” And we looked at that last Sunday.

This is the sad experience of the defection of Peter. Peter has been in Antioch for awhile. That’s a Gentile city and a Gentile church, of course. Some Jewish believers were there, but it was predominantly a Gentile church. Peter came to visit, and the whole time Peter was there, he was eating with the Gentiles. He was not asking that they be circumcised or that they prescribed to the laws of Moses, he accepted them as brothers in Christ. This is a church, these are believers; these are Gentile believers. Peter had no problem with that.

Jews didn’t eat with Gentiles. They didn’t use the same utensils. They didn’t eat the same food. They didn’t sit in the same room. They didn’t socialize with Gentiles, that was forbidden in Jewish culture. Peter had no problem: entered right in, ate with the Gentiles. That means meals, regular meals during the day, as well as the love feasts – Christians’ celebration of love – as well as the Lord’s Table, which was a part of the love feast: breaking the bread, remembering the death of Christ.

He had no problem with fellowshiping with Gentiles until certain men came purporting to come from James, who was the brother of our Lord and head of the Jerusalem church. They said they represented James. It’s almost certain that James did not send them to corrupt the gospel, he would never do that. But they claimed to come from James. And when they arrived and they began to espouse their Judaistic teaching that you must adhere to Mosaic law, you must be circumcised, and you must abide by Mosaic law, Mosaic law had elements of separation from Gentiles: couldn’t eat the same food, didn’t wear the same kind of clothes. Jews had no dealings with Gentiles.

Peter had no problem fellowshiping with them. “But when these men arrive, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof,” – why would he do that? It says – “fearing the party of the circumcision.” That’s what they are called, the party of the circumcision, those who are demanding that Gentiles be circumcised and adhere to the laws of Moses if they are to be Christians.

He’s afraid of the party of the circumcision. Why would he be afraid of them? Human fear. But why? He was the leading apostle to the Jews. If they found him doing something that they felt was wrong, they could discredit him. They were aggressive, they were vicious; he knew that. He protected his reputation. As soon as they showed up, he pulled back from the Gentiles and started acting like a Jew, isolating himself from the Gentiles.

“The rest of the Jews followed his lead,” – in verse 13 – “joining him in hypocrisy.” It’s hypocrisy because he knew the gospel, he preached the true gospel. He knew there was no constraint in the gospel for circumcision and law-keeping; he knew that. So this is hypocrisy for him to act like the Judaizers were right when he knew they were wrong. “And the rest of the Jewish believers in Antioch joined him, and Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.” Two times the word “hypocrisy” is

used in that very short thirteenth verse.

The actions of Peter and Barnabas and the other Jewish believers in Antioch is not just a matter of personal hypocrisy. It is personal hypocrisy, because they knew that what the Judaizers taught was not true. But their capitulation to the Judaizers is an assault on the doctrine of salvation. Without saying anything – and Peter doesn't say anything here. Without saying anything, he took sides with those who taught salvation by faith and works, without saying anything. He fractured the church. Overnight the church was in chaos because of his defection back to Judaism, as if the Judaizers were right, these enemies of the gospel whose message was cursed.

That brings us to verse 14. In response to Peter's defection comes Paul's doctrine. Verse 14, let me read this to you. "When I was that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas" – and this is what he said to him when he opposed him to the face as it's mentioned in verse 11; this is what he said – "I said to Cephas in the presence of all," – in front of the entire church – 'If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles – that's what you've been doing, you've been living like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?'" Paul is profoundly exercised.

Verse 14 says, "I saw that they were not straightforward, *ortho podedó*, from which we get orthopedic. *Ortho* meaning straight, *podedó* is the verb from which the word "foot" comes. They weren't walking straight. They were not walking straight about the truth of the gospel.

And again, as he said in chapter 2, verse 5, it's about the truth of the gospel that he confronts this issue. They were living out of line with the gospel. They were not walking according to gospel truth. They were off-track. They were playing the hypocrite and sending the message that the Judaizers are right: salvation is not by faith alone, it's by faith plus works. And that's another accursed gospel.

Peter had believed that he could eat and fellowship with Gentiles; he had done it. He knew that since Acts 10 and his experience with Cornelius. He had no longer lived according to Jewish prescription. He had left that behind in the tenth chapter of Acts. Now he goes back to that in a hypocritical way and leads others to the same hypocrisy. He didn't deal honestly with the truth of the gospel, he altered people's perception of truth by his behavior. What an indictment.

Paul is furious about this, and so he opposes him to his face, but he does it – middle of verse 14 – in the presence of all. Consistent with what Paul wrote to Timothy in 1 Timothy 5: "An elder who sins, rebuke before all, that others may fear." He confronts Peter in a public way.

Augustine said, "It is not advantageous to correct in secret an error which occurred publicly." He's right. You have to show public condemnation of a public sin; so he does that. It's a lot better than pulling Peter aside and trying to fix him in private. He needed to be confronted in public, because that's where his disaffection had occurred and led people into confusion.

They knew the gospel. This is a church. They're saved by faith alone, they knew that. The Gentiles knew that; the Jewish believers knew that. That's why Paul is so shocked. Back in chapter 1 he says, "I'm amazed that you're so quickly deserting Him who called you for a different gospel. Why are you leaning that way?"

Peter is not overtly saying, “I don’t believe the true gospel.” He’s just acting like what the Judaizers are teaching is true. This is a very dangerous compromise. Anytime those who preach the true gospel affirm or embrace anyone who teaches a false gospel, confusion reigns. “Come out from among them and be separate. Light has no fellowship with darkness; Christ with Belial.”

“Peter, you can’t do this. Everyone in Antioch knows you’re in the habit of living like a Gentile since the tenth chapter of Acts; and you’ve done it here. And they all know that you preach the gospel of grace, and you affirm the gospel of grace and faith alone. And now you’re playing right into the hands of the Judaizers, and you’re acting as if they’re right by lining up with them.” This threatens the integrity of the gospel. This is always about the gospel. This is a serious breach. So, with that, we come to verse 15.

We saw Paul’s response in verse 14; now we hear his statement. He’s going to go back and define the gospel again. His statement is in verses 15 and 16. “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

Important words there. The word “faith” is there. The word “law” is there. But there’s another word there used for the first time, which is critically essential to the message of this letter and to the gospel. It is the word “justified,” and you see it three times in verse 16, one time in verse 17, and then it’s repeated even again in verse 21.

Paul is going to make a statement about the doctrine of justification, which explains the true gospel’s view of faith and law. Paul unfolds this great core doctrine of justification by faith alone. This is the article of faith that Luther said, “If it’s lost, all true doctrine is lost, and the church is lost.”

How are we to understand the doctrine of justification? Let me give you a contrast. If you said to someone in a court, “You’re condemned,” you would understand that. The opposite of that is to say to someone, “You’re justified. You’re righteous.” It is the opposite of condemnation.

Justification is the opposite of condemnation. Condemnation says you are guilty, justification says you are not guilty. Condemnation says you are evil, justification says you are righteous. Condemnation says you are bad, justification says you are good. It is a legal term. It is a law court term. To condemn someone is to declare them guilty, to justify someone is to declare them not guilty. And in the Bible, justification is God’s free, gracious act, by which He declares a sinner not guilty, forgiving and pardoning that sinner, and accepting him into fellowship. That is the foundation of true religion, Christianity, and the gospel.

Again comes Bildad’s question in Job 25, “How can man be righteous before God?” How can a condemned sinner be declared just? Paul answers, “By faith. By faith in Christ. By faith alone. Not by works.”

So here we have the statement of justification by faith alone. It’s so clear and unmistakable. But let’s notice the power of this Jewish argument.

“We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles,” – verse 15. What is he saying? “We,” – meaning Jewish Christians like Peter to whom he’s speaking, and Paul, and Barnabas – “we,” – like other Jewish believers in the church at Antioch – “we, though Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles.” This is contrast you have to understand.

Paul says, “We’re all Jews by nature, those of us who are the sons of Abraham. We’ve lived all our lives under the law. We’ve lived all our lives with Scripture. We know the system well. The Jewish religious system dominated Jewish culture. It was a single soul, monolithic, monotheistic system. There weren’t multiple religions in Israel like there were in the Gentile world. There was the one religion of their form of Judaism. We lived under that, and so we were not sinners as the Gentiles.”

“What do you mean you’re not sinners?” He means, “In a visible, manifest, earthly sense, our Judaism prescribed our lives. Our Judaism restrained us. Gentiles are called sinners because they lived without restraint, they lived without restraint. Their deities are wretched. Their deities are immoral. Their temples are full of prostitutes. Gentile religion is gross, immoral religion. We weren’t like that. We know what it is to live under law. We haven’t lived like Gentile sinners. We know what it is to live under the Law, and we lived under the Law, and the Law restricted us and constrained us; and we tried to love God, and we tried to keep His commandments; and we fasted, and we prayed, and we gave alms.

And what did we learn by living under the Law? What did we learn?” – verse 16 – “This is what we learned: nevertheless in spite of that, we found out that a man is not justified by the works of the Law. We were there already; we’d been there.”

The position of the Judaizers is, “You’ve got to have the law operating.” The Jews are saying, “Hey, we’ve been there.” Paul says, “We’ve experienced all of that. We have done what Romans 10:3 says. We’ve gone about to establish our own righteousness. We’ve tried to work our way to God.” – like Paul in his testimony in Philippians 3 – “And what did we find out? We found out that a man is not justified by the works of the Law. That’s why we fled to Christ. That’s why we’re Christians.”

It was external. Jesus pointed that out in the Sermon on the Mount: “You don’t kill anybody, but you hate people; so you’re a murderer in your heart. You don’t commit adultery, but you lust; so you’re a fornicator in your heart, you’re an adulterer in your heart.”

“We know that the Law can’t change the heart; we’ve been there. All the Law did was lead us to condemnation and death. We know to try to live by the Law is futile in your own strength.” It’s astonishing then for believers to think, “We’ve got to go back to the Law.” With all their racial superiority, covenant promise, legal benefit, Scripture, they found out one very, very significant thing: the Law pronounced condemnation.

“A man is not justified by the works of the Law,” – what did we find out? – “but through faith in Christ Jesus, but through faith in Christ Jesus. That’s why we’re Christians. On the cross He died for our law-breaking. He paid the penalty for our violations of the Law. He paid the penalty in full. He bore our sins in His own body on the cross. He became sin for us. And all that is required for us to be justified is to acknowledge that sin and helplessness to repent of self-will and self-efforts and self-righteousness, and put our whole confidence in the work of Jesus Christ. We did that. We believed that we were justified, and we were given the Holy Spirit; and we’d been living in the life that God

gave us.”

Literally, he says in verse 16, “Through faith,” – *eis* – “through faith into Jesus Christ, into Jesus Christ.” It’s an act of deep commitment, not just agreeing that Jesus lived and died, but running to Him as our refuge. “And when we ran to Christ as our refuge, we embraced the one who fully satisfied the law of God, and the one who bore the penalty for all our sins by a judicial act of God, because our sins were paid for in Christ. God declared us righteous by faith alone.

Nicodemus was the ruler of the Jews. He’s a member of the ruling party the Pharisees, part of the elite leaders of Jerusalem. He is an extreme legalist at the most extreme level. He is a Pharisee, and there just are no conversions of Pharisees until you get to him. They are such extreme legalists.

He comes to Jesus in the midst of all of his fastidious, extreme legalism, and he has bound himself to all the Mosaic prescriptions. And the question in his heart is, “How do I get into the kingdom of heaven? How do I get into the kingdom of God?”

So here is a Jew who has kept the Law as much as is humanly possible, to an extreme level. And guess what; he knows he’s not in the kingdom. That’s the point to which Jewish believers came. We saw what the Law did; it was useless. Nicodemus comes with all of that, and he knows he’s not in the kingdom. He wants to know, “How can I be in the kingdom?” And Jesus doesn’t say to him, “Here’s a couple more things you need to do.” He says, “You need to be born again.”

“You need to literally go back and start all over again?” “None of that means anything. Your entire life of accumulated works are meaningless. You’re as fast on your way to hell as a humanistic, naturalistic, immoral atheist. You’ve got to start all over again, because works play no part.”

“How can that be?” says Nicodemus. Jesus says, “You have to be born from above. You can’t do it; God has to do it.” All the sinner can do is cry out to God to give him life; and faith in Christ.

“So we’ve lived under the Law. We know that a man is not justified by the works of the Law, but through faith in Christ Jesus. And so even we have believed already in Christ Jesus so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law,” – and here’s the general principle – “since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified, no flesh.” It’s impossible. “We’ve been there,” he’s saying to Peter. “We’ve been there. We’ve been under the Law. What did it do; it just condemned us.”

So you have Paul’s reaction, and then you have Paul’s statement, and he repeats it three times in that one sixteenth verse, so that it is absolutely unmistakable. It’s personal: “We believed.” It’s universal: “No flesh will be justified.” “We have believed the only possible truth that can justify us in God’s sight.” He’s still firing away, by the way, at Peter and Barnabas and the others.

So his reaction, his statement, and then I want you to notice in verse 17 to the end – and we’ll cover this briefly, even though we could spend a lifetime on it. I know you know a lot of this, so I don’t want to bring it back up again, all of it in detail. But let’s just take a look at what he says. This is his defense: his response, his statement, his defense.

He defends justification by faith alone. And here you see that the Bible is not a lot of sentimental

thoughts about religion. The Bible is full of these powerful, carefully crafted arguments of an inspired, brilliant mind; and you see one of those in these verses. So let's look at it. Stick with it.

"But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ," – which is the only way, by faith, of course – "we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin?" Now at first you read that and you say, "Wait a minute. What is he saying there?" He's basically, for the sake of argument, granting the Judaizer's point. And the point of the Judaizers is this: "If all you're doing is trusting in faith, you're not saved. You need to go back to the Law, be circumcised, and adhere to the Law."

So Paul says, "Okay. If while seeking to be justified in Christ, we end up found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? If the Judaizers are right," – think with me on this – "if the Judaizers are right, then Christ set us up for sin, because He proclaims that salvation is through faith in Him alone. And if we do that, believe in Him, receive His grace, embrace it by faith, and now you Judaizers say because we're not keeping the Law we are sinners, then Christ set us free to lead us into sin. If the Judaizers are right, demanding that we, in seeking to be justified by faith alone in Christ apart from works, are turning out to be sinners because we don't keep the Law, then are you going to say Christ made us sinners?"

"The gospel sets us free from the Law, free from the Law's tyranny, free from the Law's dominance, free from the Law's penalty. Now that Christ has set us free," – as he says in chapter 5, verse 1 – "you're saying to us that if we don't go back to the Law, Christ has made us sinners. So are you saying Christ is a minister of sin?"

Now, remember, he's talking to Peter. He's talking to Peter and Barnabas, who's been a co-pastor with him for years. "What are you doing? You are condemning Christ." It's pretty bold stuff. Peter had a history of denying Christ, didn't he.

"When you eat and function with Gentiles, and accept them in a gracious way as being brothers and sisters in Christ because of faith alone, you're right. But if you, Peter, Barnabas, and the rest, if you go along with the Judaizing legalists, then you're saying that our former liberty, your former liberty, the way you've been living since Acts 10 and the way you've been living in Antioch was sin; and therefore Christ freed you into sin. By telling you you're free from the Law, Christ made you a worse sinner than ever."

Paul recoils from his own logic, because it's blasphemy, and says, "May it never be!" *Mé genoito* in the Greek. "No, no, no, no, no. Not possible. God forbid." No, Christ isn't the sin promoter here. The Judaizers are the sin promoters.

Verse 18: "For if I rebuild what I once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. Christ isn't the transgressor by freeing us from the Law, you're the transgressor by taking us back to the Law, and rebuilding what you once destroyed in the gospel of grace. Instead of committing sin by abandoning law for grace, you become a sinner by returning to the Law which you abandoned. You're rebuilding a system of legalism."

This is some confrontation between Peter and Paul, isn't it. "If I go back and try to establish salvation by law, I'm the transgressor; I'm the hypocrite. I can't do that." Why Paul? Verse 19: "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God." He says, "This is a historical fact. I died to the

Law.”

Listen, as a Christian, you don't define your life by the Law. You don't define your life by the Law. Legalists do that, and libertines do it. Legalists define their life by the observance of the Law, libertines and antinomians define their Christian life by their indifference toward the Law. But in both cases, they're just two sides of the same coin, defining Christian experience by a relationship to the Law.

We don't define our life by a relationship to the Law, we define our life by a relationship to Jesus Christ. “I died to the Law. The Law is no longer my master. It is no longer sitting in condemnation on me. I died to the Law. That's a historical fact.

“At salvation, at the time that I believed in Christ, I died to the Law. I have no more connection to the Law; no more connection to circumcision; no more connection to sabbaths, and feast days, and festivals, and new moons,” and all the things that Paul pushes away in Colossians 2. “It doesn't mean that I live a disobedient life; quite the contrary. I have a new master: Christ. I obey Him out of love, not the Law out of fear.”

“Love” – Paul says – “fulfills the whole Law. In fact, when I lived under the Law, I couldn't keep the Law, and I was a whited sepulcher: on the outside, painted white; inside, full of stinking dead men's bones. But in Christ, I can fulfill the Law” – Romans 8:1 – “from the heart.” Why? Because with justification, comes regeneration; and with regeneration, comes a new heart, a new spirit, a new nature.

“The Law doesn't define my life. I'm not a legalist and I'm not a libertine. I don't live with a perspective toward the Law, I live to God. “How did that happen? How did you go from the Law defining everything: circumcision, all the restraints, all the restrictions, all the ceremonies, all the rituals, all the requirements? How did you go from that to just living to God?”

Verse 20 explains it, one of the great verses in the Bible. “I have been crucified with Christ.” “Oh, how did you die to the Law?” “I have been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” Do you see any law in that verse?

There's a verse that defines what it is to be a Christian. You have been crucified with Christ. “You have risen with Christ. It's no longer you who live, it's Christ living in you; and the life which you now live you don't live under the Law, but you live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me,” Paul says. “I live in love for the Savior who loved me, gave Himself up for me. I live in complete trust in Him. And out of that trust comes loving obedience.”

“What do you mean, ‘I've been crucified with Christ’?” “When He died, I died.” The reason God can justify the one who has faith in Jesus is because Jesus paid in full the penalty for that believer's sins.

Said this so many times through the years. On the cross, Jesus was punished for all the sins of all the people through all human history who would ever believe. When He died, I was crucified there. When He rose, I rose with Him. See it in Romans 6. Baptized, or immersed, into His death; immersed into His resurrection; walking in newness of life.

“Now I’m not the man I used to be. It’s no longer who live, but Christ lives in me.” What a statement; union with Christ. “I’m not the old me. I don’t live in a relationship to the Law, I live in a relationship to Christ through faith. I put all my trust in Him; and I seek to please Him, to love Him, to honor Him, to worship Him. And that translates into true obedience to God’s law; not external, not ceremonial; but moral, spiritual.”

In fact, Paul says what we all know: “For those of us who have been crucified with Christ, we’ve died with Him, have risen with Him. It’s no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” That is the clearest, simplest definition of what it is to be a Christian. It’s not you anymore, it’s Christ in you. You have become one with Him. “He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit.”

Over and over and over, Paul says, “In Christ. We’re in Christ. In Christ, in Christ, in Christ.” Then he flips it and says, “Christ in us, Christ in us, Christ in us.” “I don’t know where I end and He begins. I don’t live by law. Don’t take me back. I live by love. I live by faith in the one who loved me and gave Himself up for me.” What an incredible truth.

The moment we believe by a divine miracle, we have been crucified with Christ. The Law’s demands against us for all the violations are satisfied. They have no more hold on us. Self dies. The dominating power of the old nature is broken. “I live, yet not I. It’s a transformed I instead of a sinner with a totally depraved nature attempting to earn acceptance with God by works. I’m now a saint, accepted, beloved, with Christ living in me, living His life through me. I’m obedient because He’s obedient.”

Paul says, “Look, you can’t let go of this.” Verse 21: “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly. If you add works, then grace is no more grace. I will not set aside. I will not nullify. I will not declare as invalid salvation by grace through faith, and allow for any works at all. If it comes by my works, then Christ died needlessly.” I hope you feel the power of Paul’s words, and remember to whom he spoke them: to Peter.

The pillars of the Christian faith are the grace of God, faith in Christ, and the death and resurrection of Christ. If anyone insists that he can earn his salvation by his own efforts, he undermines the grace of God, salvation by faith alone, and the complete efficacy of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. With this, Paul defends the truth of the gospel.

We come to You, Lord, at the end of a wonderful time of worship, fellowship, blessing; thankful beyond expression for the grace that reached down and gave us life when we were dead in trespasses and sins. We thank You that You have regenerated us, given us faith in the true gospel, justified us, redeemed us, that you’re sanctifying us, and one day will bring us to eternal glory.

We rejoice in the gospel. May we be true to the gospel, never lean the other way, never deviate, never ever give anyone who proclaims a false gospel any affirmation that they are acceptable. May we be bold for the truth of the gospel, and may You be glorified.

Because Christ became sin for us, we have become the righteousness of God in Him. Help us to understand the richness of our union with Christ, which defines our life, and makes us love Your law, which was impossible before we were redeemed. We could fear it; we couldn’t love it. But now we

love it. We live by faith in Christ and the love that comes from Him.

Thank You for what You're going to do in all our hearts with the truth. It's Your Word, more powerful than any two-edged sword. Wield it today in our own hearts we pray, for Your glory. Amen.

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