

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 5-25-14 AM
 “DYING TO LIVE”
 GALATIANS 2:17-21
 # 5 in Series, “Galatians: Living with Roots”

One of the commonly held rules of preaching is that you don't start off a message with really heavy, deep, focused truths. You start out light and work your way into the deep stuff. I'm going to violate that today. I'm going to jump right in to some deep and yet essential truths. My time is limited and all that I am going to say in this message depends on you getting what I am going to talk about in the first 10 minutes of the message. Don't turn me off because I am using big words. I'm defining those big words. Understanding these truths has eternal consequences. Some would say that the most important doctrinal verse in Galatians is one that we looked at last week. **Galatians 2:16 (NKJV)** “knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.” We spent a lot of time on verse 16 last week, but I want to dig a little deeper today. The Westminster Shorter Catechism defines justification this way: “Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in His sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone.” [Answer 33]. We saw in the last message that to be righteous before God is to be accepted by God. How can a holy God declare us righteous, accepted by Him? We don't have any righteousness before God. **Romans 3:10b (NKJV)** “*There is none righteous, no, not one*”. When we respond to the Gospel by repenting of sin and we savingly believe on Christ and His finished work on the cross, Christ's righteousness is imputed to us (literally put on our account). **Romans 4:6 (NKJV)** “just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works”. The Greek word translated “imputes” here is translated “credits”, “counts” or “reckons” in other translations. It is an accounting term that means to put on someone's account. The whole doctrine of salvation from Genesis through Revelation can be summarized by 3 uses of that word “impute”. First, when Adam, the head of the human race, our representative sinned, the guilt of his sin was imputed to his descendents. We were all born with the consequences of Adam's sin – spiritual death. **1 Corinthians 15:22a (NKJV)** “For as in Adam all die...” The second imputation is when Christ hung on that old rugged cross, our sins were imputed to Him. The third use of impute is that when we savingly believe on Christ, His righteousness, His acceptance with the Father is imputed to us. In Christ, we stand righteous before a holy God! The Father views us as partaking in Christ's righteousness. Though the word “impute” isn't used, we see imputation most clearly in **2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV)** “For He [God the Father] made Him [God the Son] who knew no sin *to be* sin for us [imputation], that we might become the righteousness of God in Him [imputation].” Allow me to paraphrase that verse putting all three uses of the concept of imputation together. “Because Adam's guilt was imputed to us and we were without righteousness and acceptance before God, He loved us so much that He imputed our sin to Christ on the cross, who being born of a virgin escaped the guilt of Adam's sin and had no sin of His own so that when we savingly believe on Christ and His successful atonement for sin, His righteousness, His acceptance before the Father is imputed to us.” Oh, when we understand that, how can we keep from shouting, “Hallelujah”?

Here is why I began this message with those deep but glorious truths. To understand the passage that we are looking at today and really the rest of Galatians depends on having a grasp on these truths.

Let me set the context of our text. Paul begins Galatians 2 by recounting an earlier experience at Antioch where he had confronted Peter and Barnabas and other Jewish Christians when they stopped eating with the Gentile Christians because they heard that some Jews from Jerusalem were coming to check on them. Their reason for pulling back from the Gentile believers was that Jewish law forbade it. These Jews that were coming to Antioch were false teachers that said a Gentile could not be saved apart from keeping the law of Moses (circumcision of the males, offering the sacrifices, and keeping the feasts, and the dietary laws). Peter didn't believe that Gentiles had to become Jews to be saved. He had made that

clear earlier at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). Peter, however, suffered a temporary lack of courage and a fear of man gripped him and he turned from these Gentile believers which was a horrendous act that distorted the Gospel. Paul rebuked Peter and said that he was perverting the Gospel of grace and the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Christ alone apart from the law through his actions. The implications are that Peter accepted the rebuke and repented. Having stated in verse 16 the doctrine of justification, in today's passage he is expounding on it and its implications.

I. In Christ, We Are Justified Apart from the Law (V17-18)

This is a difficult passage to interpret and conservative scholars differ over the meaning. I will share what I think it is saying. The interpretation I am giving you seems to best fit the context. Paul is still giving evidence of the seriousness of Peter and Barnabas' action in pulling away from the Gentiles and going back under the dietary and separation requirements of the law. Peter himself had said in **Acts 15:10-11 (NKJV)** ¹⁰“Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the [Gentile] disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? ¹¹But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [Gentiles].” Now because of a fear of man, Peter is vacillating. Here is Paul's argument: “Peter, you and I did not find salvation through the law; we were saved by grace through faith in Christ. By your going back to the law, you are saying that Christ really didn't save you and so Christ made you a sinner”. This argument must have devastated Peter. Paul is saying that Peter's actions said that Christ has become a “promoter” (HCSB) of sin. This of course was not what Peter believed, but it was what his actions communicated to others. Jesus clearly taught that no food can pollute or spiritually contaminate a person in Mark 7:19. If these Judaizers are correct, then Christ was a minister of sin. That thought so appalled Paul that he answers it with one of the strongest negatives in the Greek language. It is translated “May it never be!” in the NASB. Paul did not go easy on Peter; the truth of the Gospel was at stake. He not only called Peter a hypocrite (V13) by going back under the law, he tells Peter that his actions made Jesus seem to be a minister (“promoter” HCSB) of sin!

In verse 18, Paul is saying, “Peter, you have proclaimed to the Gentiles salvation by grace and anytime we go back to trusting in the law we are building back the very thing we tore down with the truth of grace.” It may seem like Paul is “piling on”, but he is not. Anything that we do to pervert or misrepresent the Gospel is so serious that it must be confronted in the strongest way possible.

Allow me to make an application to the truths in verses 17-18 for our day. Our greatest temptation to pervert the Gospel and be the hypocrite and make Christ seem to be a “promoter of sin” is to deny the changing power of the Gospel. Our greatest temptation is not to go back under the law and imply by our actions that salvation is by grace and works (that is what some do, but here in the Bible belt that is not the main damage done to the Gospel). Here is how our perversion of the Gospel manifests itself. “If you will just ask Jesus into your heart, you are saved, and because saved people are secure, you can live like the devil, ignore the Bible, scorn the church (Christ's bride) and then go to heaven because you asked Jesus into your life and once saved always saved”. Oh what a perversion of the Gospel. We so often turn the Gospel into a license to sin. I often paraphrase Martin Luther when he said that the Devil wants you to fall off the truth horse and he doesn't care if you fall off to the right or to the left! In Galatians, Peter and the other Jews were falling off the truth horse on the side that communicated by their actions that salvation is attained by grace through faith plus works (keeping the law). Today, we fall off the truth horse on the other side that says when you quote a prayer asking Jesus into your life, there isn't necessarily any change and you can continue in sin. That is a perversion of the Gospel. The Gospel received, results in our becoming a “new creation” with the old passed away and a new nature that desires to please God (2 Corinthians 5:17). Jonathan Edwards called it “holy affections”. True salvation is not attained by works, but it is always evidenced by good works naturally flowing out of a changed life and changed affections.

II. In Christ We Are Dead to the Law (V19)

Verse 19 sets up the glorious truth of verse 20. The first question we must answer is, “What does it mean to die to the law?” Notice that the law does not die. The law is alive and well. Paul is the one who has died with respect to the law. While the law is good, it offers us no help; it only condemns us. **Romans 3:19-20 (NKJV)** “¹⁹ Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God. ²⁰ Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin.” No one has ever been saved by the law. **1 Timothy 1:8 (NKJV)** “But we know that the law *is* good if one uses it lawfully”. What is the lawful use of the law? It condemns us by showing us our sin and thus the need for a Savior. The law requires and administers death. Anyone who fails to keep the whole law is under the curse of the law (Galatians 3:10). Paul is simply saying that he died to the law as a means of salvation. The law is good in that it shows us the hopelessness of depending on works to save us. In Christ, we are dead to the law because Christ has taken the law’s curse and died in our place. Ah, but that is not all. Verse 20 enlarges on why we are no longer under the law’s curse.

III. In Christ, We Are Free from Sin’s Bondage (V20)

This is one of the clearest verses in the Bible concerning our union with Christ. Let me say a few things about this glorious doctrine of our union with Christ that one prominent theologian called the “central truth of the doctrine of salvation” (John Murray). Perhaps the best definition of this doctrine of our union with Christ is by Wayne Grudem. “Union with Christ is a phrase used to summarize several different relationships between believers and Christ, through which Christians receive every benefit of salvation. These relationships include the fact that we are in Christ, Christ is in us, we are like Christ, and we are with Christ.” [Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, page 840]. With that introduction, let’s investigate Galatians 2:20.

A. We Are Identified with Christ (V20a)

The tense here is important. It is the perfect tense. The perfect tense in Greek refers to something that happened in the past that has continuing results. There were four things that were nailed to the cross of Christ. **First**, Jesus Himself was nailed to the cross. This happened at a time in History. A nail was driven through each hand (probably at the wrist) and a single nail was driven through his feet as they were placed on top of the other. **Second**, a public announcement was nailed to the cross that said, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19:19). The **third** thing nailed to the cross was the debt of our sin. **Colossians 2:13-14 (NASB)** “¹³ When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, ¹⁴ having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.” Ah, but there was a **fourth** thing nailed to that cross. If you have savingly believed on Christ, the old you in Adam was nailed there also! That is what this verse is saying. The same thing is stated in **Romans 6:6 (HCSB)** “For we know that our old self was crucified with Him in order that sin’s dominion over the body may be abolished, so that we may no longer be enslaved to sin”. That truth is hard for us to grasp. The cross of Christ was an event in history. How could we be crucified with Christ when we were not born until almost 2000 years later? Our difficulty in comprehending this is because we are bound by the time dimension and God is not. He created the time dimension and God is not limited by His creation. With God, there is no past and future. Everything is present. He is the great “I Am”. He knows the end from the beginning. He lives in the eternal present. God knows the elect, those He will save, from before the foundation of the world (Ephesians 1:4). God saw us in union with Christ when Christ was crucified. That is objective truth. That truth becomes real in experience time when I choose to repent of my sin and savingly believe on Christ. The old me in Adam that was enslaved to sin, condemned by the law, beyond help and hope, unable to be fixed was nailed to the cross with Christ. To be identified with Christ, in union with Christ, means that all of Christ’s experiences become ours. We have been crucified with Him and raised up with Him. **1 Corinthians 15:22 (NKJV)** “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” There was a new creation raised up with Christ that loves the things of God and loves the Word of God. Because of our

death with Christ and our resurrection with Christ, we are free from the penalty of Sin (death) and we are no longer enslaved to the power of sin that before Christ enslaved us. **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” This is glorious truth! If you are in Christ, the old you in Adam that was doomed to eternal death and enslaved to sin is now dead and buried. Just as Christ rose from the dead, even so you have been raised with Him a new creation who is no longer condemned by the law (Christ fulfilled the law) and no longer a slave of sin.

B. We Are Indwelt by Christ (V20b)

Technically, the Christian life is not our living for Christ; it is Christ living through us. This is the key that makes the Christian life gloriously possible. In Christ we live out the life that pleases God, not in our strength, but by faith in the Son of God who lives in us, for it is the Son of God who has loved us and has given Himself for us. Hallelujah!

My greatest fear is that you will see these truths as concepts that never get worked out in the hard details of everyday life. These are gloriously practical truths that enable us to walk in victory over sin, Satan, the flesh, and the world daily. When I am pulled by the world, the Devil, or the indwelling power of sin, I simply reckon on the truth of who I am. **Romans 6:11 (NKJV)** “Likewise you also, reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord.” After reckoning, I rest by faith in the power of Christ in me to enable me to walk in obedience to Him and to walk by faith that He is moment by moment enabling me to say yes to God and no to all which would pull me into disobedience against this One that I love with all my being and long to please. That is the victorious Christian life!

CONCLUSION (V21)

Paul concludes this section of Galatians by taking us back to grace. When a person seeks to be justified by the law and not by the grace of God poured out on us through Christ, that person has missed the Gospel and has despised the precious grace of God. Christ will do everything for you or He will do nothing. You cannot mix grace and human merit. If justification is by works, merit, keeping the law, then Christ died in vain. If we understand that we have no merit and that it is impossible to save ourselves, Christ’s death will mean everything to us. From a heart of love and thanksgiving, we will give our lives to obey and glorify Him whatever He calls us to do.

In Christ, we have a new past – our old man is crucified with Him. In Christ we have a new present – Christ lives in us to enable us to love and obey God out of a heart of love for Him. In Christ, we have a new future. We are raised with Christ, Justified (declared righteous and accepted by God) and the barrier is removed so that we may spend eternity in God’s presence. Hallelujah for the Gospel. Don’t ever water it down or distort it. (3176)