

## *What Is Our Trust?*

Galatians 2:14-21

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So we come to God's Word this morning. We are in Galatians chapter two. This is a series for the remainder of the summer, gospel renewal, and it specifically looking at the central doctrines of the Christian faith. And each week, we'll look at a central doctrine. And some of the doctrines we'll be looking at—both an Old Testament Scripture which displays that doctrine, as well as a New Testament Scripture. And so we began last week with the doctrine of justification, looking at Numbers, and now we look at a New Testament counterpart of this great doctrine, Galatians chapter two.

One of the things that I've learned over the last number of years—I understood intuitively as a cyclist that learning how to balance yourself in the saddle meant you learned how to stay on your bike. But I've learned by watching my daughter what that must be like riding a horse. Balance in riding a horse is a bit more complicated than on a bicycle. And I asked her this week how important it is to learn your balance. And she said, it's something you learn at the very beginning, but if you get it wrong, things go wrong very quickly. Martin Luther, in teaching on the great doctrine of justification, reflected on the nature of humanity. He said, "Human nature is like a drunkard in the saddle. He falls off on the left, he gets himself back up on the saddle and tries to make sure he doesn't make that same mistake again—doesn't fall off to the left—and in the process of not trying to fall off to the left, he falls off to the right."

It's very difficult as a human being to trust in the work of Jesus Christ. And in this passage this morning, we uncover what is the gravitational center of the Christian faith. In fact, it is arguably the gravitational center of all of Paul's theology in his many letters. And it is that great doctrine of justification at which Luther would also say something about human beings, and specifically the Christian. And what he said about the Christian was this—he said this great Latin phrase, which he coined. He says, "How is the Christian to see himself in this world? It is *simul justus et peccator*: at the same time, righteous, justified, and sinner. This is the gravitational center of the Christian faith—that in Christ, we are found to be at the same time justified, but at the same time sinners. If we get this doctrine wrong, then the rest of Christianity goes off-center and no longer is Christianity. It becomes a man-made, man-sustained faith.

I say this because it was for Paul the center line of the gospel, as we will see this morning in Galatians chapter two. Hear now God's Word, as it will present us with this question: what is your trust? What is my trust? Now, God's Word, Galatians chapter two.

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, 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 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

"If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but

Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

This is the Word of God. Thanks be to God. Will you pray with me?

Lord, by your tender mercies, through the divine power of your Holy Spirit, open our eyes and our hearts to the reality that we want to be our own saviors—that the most difficult thing to do is to trust in the just righteousness of Jesus Christ. Lord, help us to see where we need this doctrine, and how utterly practical it is, for on it we find our trust, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Help us, we pray. Help the teacher. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

We’re going to look at three things in fairly quick succession this morning. It is—who is involved that Paul is speaking to is of incredible importance. Secondly, what is the problem? Thirdly, how do we respond? Who is involved, what is the problem, how do we respond.

Who is involved? This is Paul’s earliest letters. This is the beginning of the church. Paul has planted these congregations. He’s now continued on his missionary journeys. In his place, Peter and Barnabas continue to minister in the name of Jesus Christ as disciples and followers of Jesus. And what Paul says to them, and specifically to Peter, who then leads astray other disciples, and here, specifically, Barnabas—Paul does something interesting in this passage. He says to them, verse fourteen, “When I say that they,” meaning Peter and Barnabas, “were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel.” He’s showing that what he’s getting ready to talk about is not merely how one becomes a Christian, for justification by faith alone is the means through which a sinner becomes a Christian.

But justification is not just about how one becomes a Christian; it is also about how a Christian learns to be a Christian, which is why in verse fifteen, it’s very easy to overlook a simple pronoun—we. But the interesting thing about Greek is a mood, a way of showing, well, what kind of “we” is being talked about here? It’s not just who, it’s the kind of who—the intensity upon which Paul is grounding what he’s getting ready to say. And when verse fifteen begins with “we who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners,” he’s saying this—it’s in Greek an intensive “we,” which means, we, Peter, we, Barnabas, we that includes Paul. Meaning, this is the insiders of the insiders. These are the leaders of the leaders. These are not outsiders saying these things. These are not recent converts who have simply not understood what has happened in Christ Jesus. But these are the witnesses. These are the direct descendants of the earliest converts—Peter, the rock, the preacher, the teacher, the boisterous one, the bold one, the courageous one, who, trusting in the suffering of Christ in his place, would call him into direct suffering for the name of Christ. Peter, who would preach the gospel to those who would be the persecutors of Stephen, those who were the persecutors of Christ. Peter.

So there is something dramatic about this, and that is, first, that Paul does not mind at all calling into question the leaders of the leaders. Secondly, not just dramatic, there is something incredibly scary about this reality, too. And it’s this—if there is any group of people who should have understood this doctrine and its implications, it was Peter. Meaning, this isn’t just about how you become a Christian. It’s about how one lives as a Christian. So if Peter can fall out of the saddle and miss this doctrine and what it looks like not just for converts but for converted Christians, then how much more so can we? Peter, who witnessed Christ’s ministry. Peter, who was a witness to his resurrection. Peter, who directly received the teaching of trusting in the righteousness of Christ. It means this reality—that if you as a Christian this morning, if you are one, if you look at this doctrine and you can walk through this passage, and you say to yourself, this is not a problem for me—then you’re either in self-denial, or maybe you do not know Christ. If you are not wrestling with this doctrine in some way, shape, or form, you’re not wrestling enough with the Christian faith. Trusting as a Christian in the righteousness of Christ is both the most beautiful thing and the most difficult thing. So the “we” are those who are Christians. What is your trust?

Secondly, not only who was involved, but what was the problem? The problem was a requirement. That was the problem. Paul outlines it when he says, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile." So he's pointing out to Peter his hypocrisy. And he says, "You live like a Gentile, not like a Jew. How is it, then, you're forcing Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?" So what was happening in Galatia is that these Gentile converts were being required through Peter's teaching, and Barnabas, to follow Jewish law as a statement of their seriousness, the statement of their trust in being a Christian. And Paul is saying, that is absolutely opposite of what the gospel teaches. And he does so by asking a rhetorical question. The answer is obvious.

And so Paul not only exposes this false requirement that Peter was requiring—he has a response. And Paul's response is this. He confronts with the gospel, because the gospel is being corrupted. They are falling out of line with the gospel, and it is this—it is not just, as I said, how we are saved, but how we live. It goes to the central question of what we trust. And so he says to them in verse fifteen, "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." Now, here he's not specifically talking a comparison of ethnicity. But the intensity or the focus of that verse is, we who lived once by the law. We were law-observers. And he says, we who were once law-observers came to a knowledge of understanding it is not by the law that we are converted, and it is not by the law that we remain in Christ. For he says, we are not justified by the law, but we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, that word "faith" is important, because it has a history. The problem is, we have had an etymological shift over the centuries of what the word "faith" actually means. Now the word "faith" is this sort of fuzzy understanding, a perhaps it might happen. In other words, I have faith that my flight will leave at 6:30 this afternoon. We'll see. It's sort of a fuzzy trust. It's a soft trust. It's a sense in, well, I'm not exactly sure, but I'll put a little bit of money on that. But faith in its original use was never a fuzzy form of knowing, but it was rock-solid sense of trust which comes from the same root word as the word "truth." In other words, faith is like the word "belief." And it was never, ever just a sense that I believe a set of doctrines. Belief in its original root sense meant love, faithfulness to a person. Shakespeare used it in quite this way. But over the years, the word "belief" and the word "faith" and the word, then, "trust" is something that is not a sure bet, and it's certainly not something that is a person, but rather just a set of beliefs.

And so over the last hundred and fifty years or so, we've largely put faith and belief and trust to the weekend. That's for Sundays. Monday through Friday is for reality. It's for the stuff of life, the material things, the things that are rock-solid and known. But that is not how Paul meant it, and it is not actually the history of the word and how they are originally used. But rather, when Paul says that it is by faith in Jesus Christ, by faith alone, it is this—it is by belief in, love for, faithfulness into, trusting and putting oneself into the hands of another. Who do you "lie" from the word "belief." Who do you love? What do you trust? It's not just a what, it's a who do you trust. And so Paul's response is, you are corrupting the actual center of the Christian faith if you are leading people to trust or to find true or to love or to believe in anything other than Jesus Christ and his death on a cross—not just for Sundays, but for every day. For how we live our lives not just vertically to God, but how we live our lives horizontally in the stuff, in the mundane. This, for Paul, was a central problem. It was the corruption of the center of the Christian faith that would lead Christians and converts to trust in something other than the finished work of Jesus Christ. But not just the finished work of Jesus Christ, not just his work on the cross on Good Friday, but rather, as well—not rather, but in addition to, his entire life that led up to Good Friday. His active righteousness as Christ.

You see, we often believe that what gets us into the Christian faith is trusting what Jesus did on Good Friday in giving his body on the cross, and in being raised to life on the third day. While that is true, you have no cross if you have no perfect sacrifice. How do we have a perfect sacrifice? Because Christ obeyed perfectly in everything he did. He was righteousness revealed. And so I need the righteousness of

Christ not just for the forgiveness of my sins—I need the righteousness of Christ to live. It must become my trust. What is our trust?

How do we respond? We respond by, first, recognizing a reality. Reality is this—and this is what Paul is establishing and would become one of the central arguments from the early church straight through to today. This doctrine is still be argued about today, from seminaries to pulpits to Bible studies. And here's the reality. And I'll use an early church father and his great portrait of this. He says, "Just as Christ was crucified between two thieves, so is the doctrine of justification. It is between two thieves." The two thieves of the gospel are legalism or license. Being led into legalism leads us to believe that our righteousness, our obedience, is what maintains God's gracious stance towards us. The opposite problem is presuming that God's grace does not require a change in how I live, therefore it doesn't matter how I live. And that makes it presumptive grace. So one is the pride in oneself, the other is a presumption that grace doesn't require change. These are the two thieves of the gospel—legalism or license, pride or presumption of grace.

This was and is a central problem, because even Paul in this set of verses underlines such thieves. First, we see it when Paul says in verse seventeen—we hear him speak of legalism when he says,

If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.

What is he talking about? He's saying, in being justified in Christ, it becomes palpably evident that I am a sinner before his law. Does that mean that Christ promotes sin? No. So my response when I realize that I am a sinner in the face of God's righteous law—one of my temptations is to go towards legalism. And so Paul says, if I rebuild what I destroy—meaning, if I go back to the way I used to live, trying to seek grace and righteousness by my own obedience, then I am destroying the very thing that is my means of salvation. Why? Because the law becomes a means of salvation, meaning it leads me to see that I am dead. All it can do is deliver a true sentence. It only exposes my sin. And by that, it leads me to Christ. That's what I mean by means—it has an end. It leads me to the end of myself and in seeing Christ in all that he is. And so Paul says, "If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners," I might be tempted to go back and try again. But he says, if I do that, then I will only prove myself to be a law-breaker. Because all the law can do is to show me my death, my inability before the holiness of God, that I cannot do it. The only way I can do this is to live for God by grace, by faith in Christ.

The second he notes in verse twenty. So that was legalism. But here, he says something different. He says, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" He's saying, if I simply think that it doesn't require any change at all, then it just becomes presumption. If I'm never really changed, then Christ died for nothing. We can't set aside grace. Grace brings about transformative life in its path. So if I say, it's all of grace, but think that it doesn't change me, then we are selling short the gospel. We're robbing the gospel of its power. The two thieves, legalism and license, pride or presumption of grace.

So that is the reality. And so here is the temptation, then. Our temptation, much like Peter, much like Barnabas, is recognizing what side do I tend to be tempted by? Pride or presumption? Pride in myself tends to lead to this—it leads to a low view of my own corruption. It leads to a very low view of my sin, and a low view, ironically, of God's holiness. You see, if I believe that I can be justified and earn God's grace in any stitch or any sense, then my view of the law isn't high enough. Because if we see the holiness of God and the law which is a revelation of who he is and his righteousness—if I really see it, then how

could I ever think that by one stitch of obedience I can merit any favor before God? I simply cannot. My view of the law is too low. My view of my own corruption is too low.

But if it's presumption, then the other problem becomes that I have too high a view of my own human capacity, and too low a view of God's holiness. You see, it's the flipside of legalism. Here I think, well, yes I'm corrupt, but oh well. It's all of grace. But then I also have too low a view of God's holiness, because if God is holy, and if he has drawn us to himself through the work of Christ, and if we believe that God does receive us as we are—but if we believe that Christ will keep us as we are, then we're misunderstanding our glorious, glorious destination.

Whether pride or presumption of grace, both nullify the grace of the gospel—a grace that says there is only one way to God, by faith, through the righteousness of Christ alone—but a grace that will bring about change in me. Not on this side of Christ's return, but finally I'll be utterly transformed to reflect his glory when he returns. But until then, I am a work in progress. We're up, we're down. We struggle. We're tempted. We fall prey to sin. But here's the thing. When we rob the gospel with either legalism or license, we're actually giving way to more sin. Because what will happen? The fruit of these thieves of the gospel will issue forth in anxiety, because our stance is reliant on ourselves. It will lead to fear and pride, because I can do it—Lord, give me one more chance. But it can also live to sensuality, in believing, ah, it's just all of grace. God just accepts me like I am. I'll just ask forgiveness. It leads to more and more lust, and more and more sensuality.

Paul wants to say, there is a response. There is an application. And he gives it to us when he says in verse twenty, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." The life I live in the flesh, in the body, the stuff of life, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me. That means that the application of this doctrine means that we must be careful not to relegate these doctrines and the doctrine of justification to the weekend. You see, this is not just a vertical sense of how God makes us right with himself through the alien righteousness of Christ, through whom God declares us as righteous. Therefore, it reconciles us to him. But it is also a radically horizontal doctrine. Because if I'm tempted to live by pride or presumption before God, it will directly affect how we live before one another. What do I mean? What I mean is, it will produce anxiety and pride and lust of the flesh, and that will most certainly affect how we deal with each other.

Let me give a recent illustration. I received a prayer letter from a pastor, church planter, in Greece. Pastor Jiodus is his name. As many of you know, the Greek debt crisis has caused not just financial turmoil, but spiritual turmoil, relational turmoil. Listen to what he says.

In the light of the tumultuous events taking place in Greece over the past few days, we have taken the time to write to you this message to allay some of your concerns, to help you understand what the situation is like for us here, and to inform your prayers, which are certainly much-needed at this time. The mood is very grim indeed here in Athens. While nobody knows what will happen with the referendum or the vote of the EU, the imminent referendum has created an atmosphere of tension and polarization.

Unfortunately, this situation has also severely and adversely affected the church. There is very little attempt on the part of believers to view themselves as people whose primary identity is as fellow children of God. There is very little witness as to how the gospel creates a different kind of community, where people do not turn on each other for these kinds of reasons. There is also much fear and anxiety and self-interest, which is unbecoming of those who trust in a sovereign, good God of Calvary and glory. It is more reminiscent of those who simply fear losing their earthly comforts.

Make no mistake—right now, this is our culture war. It has divided Greek society. And with further livelihoods and fortunes on the cusp of things being lost, things are not expected to

improve. Yet, it is also a great opportunity, as we come face to face with our own sinfulness. It is an opportunity for us to come together as a body and confess our sin and our lack of dependence, trust, in God. It is also an opportunity testify to the security and confidence we have in Christ. Yours in Jesus. Pastor Jiodus.

Vertically, we talk about, what is our trust before a holy God? How are we trying to maintain our status? How are we trying to justify our falling short? You think that has an application horizontally in the Greek crisis? You think that has horizontal impact on how we live before one another? You bet it does. For if I fall short of finding approval in your glory, I will try to become a people-pleaser so that you will respect me. If I didn't become what my parents thought I would become, I can likely spend the rest of my life in bouts of depression trying to prove to my father and mother over and over again that maybe, just maybe, this year I will show that I'll become the thing they hoped me to be. If my children are not living up to what I had hoped, the Christian gospel has not taken root in their lives, I can fall prey to anxiety and fear. What have I done? Can I undo it? What can I try to do?

If I'm falling prey to a sinful pattern from which I feel it impossible to find release from its grip, I try over and over again either to try to show God, I'm going to try to do it again. I'm going to try to pray fifteen minutes more a day. I'm going to try to read through the gospels a verse at a time. Or, well, just one more drink. Just one more video. God will forgive me. I'll just ask for it in the morning. God accepts me for who I am. He knows my history. It's been a hard week. It's been a difficult year. I deserve this. Whether it's legalism or it's license, they both rob the Christian of the very thing upon which there is only one solid foundation—Christ died for me. His blood not only makes me clean; his life, every obedient act, every passive giving himself up for me, is mine by faith. And before God, as Paul says, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

And so I finish with two things, as we now prepare to come to the Lord's Supper this morning. The first is from our confession of faith, chapter eleven:

Those whom God effectually calls, He also freely justifies; not by infusing righteousness into us, but by pardoning our sins, and by accounting and accepting our persons as righteous; not for any thing wrought in us, or done by us, but for Christ's sake alone; nor by imputing faith itself, the act of believing, or any other evangelical obedience to us, as our righteousness; but by imputing the obedience and satisfaction of Christ unto us, we receiving and resting on Him and His righteousness by faith; which faith we have not of ourselves earned, but it is the gift of God.

If you'll recognize, I personalized that for us. That is our statement of faith. But oh, how difficult it is to live. And so I invite you in this conclusion where we began. As Luther put it, the Christian is *simul justus et peccator*: simultaneously accepted, yet a sinner. "When the gospel dawns on a soul, it becomes a transforming power," Romans 1:17. A Christian says, though I have often failed to obey the law, the deeper problem is why I was ever trying to obey it to begin with. Even our effort to obey it is just a way of seeking to be our own saviors. And that mindset, if we obey or ask for forgiveness, we are really resisting the gospel and setting ourselves up as savior—if we try to obey the law and ask forgiveness. To get the gospel is to turn from self-justification and to rely on Jesus' record for a relationship with God and a relationship with one another. Lay your deadly doing down, down at Jesus' feet. Stand in him alone, gloriously complete. This is the gospel, the gravitational center of our trust. What is our trust? Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, by your mercy, open our eyes and our hearts to hear that in Christ alone and his righteousness is here salvation. This faith, this trust, is a gift of the living God. Lord, we pray, enable us to receive it, to rejoice in it, and to trust. Help us, we pray—sinners, in need of grace. In Jesus' name. Amen.