

Becoming Justified Before God

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[0 : 00] Let's get into Galatians chapter 2. We're going to read from verse 11 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel I said to Cephas in front of them all You are a Jew 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 are not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ not by the works of the law because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

But even seeking to be justified in Christ we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not. If I rebuild what I destroyed then I really would be a lawbreaker for through the law I die to the law so that I might live for God.

[2 : 03] I've been crucified with Christ I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness could be gained through the law Christ died for nothing. And so Father it's our prayer as we come to your word this morning your living and active words we pray that you would pierce our hearts and our souls and our minds and our intentions.

Lord may we leave here this morning with a bigger view of who you are and a bigger appreciation and affection for your Son in whose name we pray. Amen.

Amen. Well there's a meme that so often every so often it surfaces on my social media feed. I wonder if you've seen this. It's the famous scene painted by American Norman Rockwell of a man standing up and speaking at a town meeting.

And it always makes me think of that saying that we so often use in our culture. See if you can complete it for me here. We use this phrase it goes like this that's not a hill that I'm prepared to die on.

[3 : 34] Which invites the question like the man in the picture doesn't it? Which hills are? Here's what you need to know about Galatians chapter 2 today the second half.

This is Paul's hill. and it comes it presents itself at an absolutely critical junction in the life of the early church.

And by the end of this friends we're going to be so glad that he did. And just in case you're here and you're thinking he's talking about what this morning?

Hardly understood understood about 60% of the words in that reading. What on earth is going on? A church squabble? Do me a favour. Let me engage you for a minute.

Here's why I love you whoever you are here today whatever you think about the God of the Bible we love that you're here. Here's what I'd love to engage you with this morning. The cash out of this if you hang on in there is the very thing that this week in particular has made us long for.

[4 : 51] The very thing that our multicultural multi-ethnic hostile and fractured world strives and longs for but for all the money and all the talks in the world cannot seem to achieve.

Do you know what it is? It is unity in diversity. If you're just joining us in this series this is a great one for you to tap into maybe you think I've missed the first couple of chapters you can go back and listen to that on the website if you'd like but let me tell you why we thought this was a great one to do this Sunday to get us back into this letter particularly if this is your first one in this series.

What we're taking in this morning is the theological heart centre of this letter. If you like verses 15 and 16 have a look at it there.

This is the middle of the Galatians mind map. Mind Now I ran that past Bogdan during the week he says people today don't talk about mind maps is it more vision flowing statements I don't know what they call them these days but you can tell I'm a millennial mind maps okay I still draw in mind maps verses 15 and 16 this is the middle of the Galatians mind map and if you're like our family you love to watch that TV game show called catchphrase you'll know that the middle solves the riddle the middle solves the riddle okay always a great thing to look for if you're coming to a book of the Bible no matter how long or short that will help you understand what it's all about the middle solves the riddle if you can get to the why the purpose the big idea you get to that everything else will begin to fall into place the middle solves the riddle 15 and 16 are the middle of the riddle because here is the debate up for grabs in Galatia there's the region on the map that Paul's writing to here's the question how is somebody made right with God how is somebody made right with God and these Judaizers Paul calls them the circumcision group here have waltzed into these churches in Galatia and they are saying how is someone made right with God it is Jesus plus what we do it is Jesus plus obedience to the law it's Jesus plus circumcision and Paul responds in true parent style do you see how in these verses he doesn't say his answer once he doesn't say his answer twice he says his answer three times do you see it there we are justified before God and that word if you're new to it this morning it just means to be declared right in the sight of we are declared justified in the sight of this God not by works of the law or our efforts we are declared justified by faith in

[8 : 04] Jesus Christ we are saved and this is what we've been saying over the last number of weeks the reformation mantra we are saved by grace alone grace just that word meaning God's undeserved favour right grace alone through faith alone we'll come back to that word in a minute grace alone faith alone in Christ alone there's one way to be right with God and what this does when we really get it it both humbles the proud and it's also great news for those who are at rock bottom and think no way could I ever hope to know the God of the universe the three in one God that Sam was telling us about a minute ago do you see what it is it humbles the proud it is good news for those at rock bottom because it raises us up the gospel is not that Jesus has done something no through his life and his death on the cross

Jesus has done not something but everything and like one of those crazy fall backwards trust exercises that you used to do in team building days when I was a young person trying to get through the workplace the gospel call is to trust fully in and collapse totally into the arms of an all sufficient Jesus and that's the hill that Paul's willing to die on 15 and 16 friends are the middle of the riddle now here's two things that we're going to take and learn from this passage this morning as we think about how we apply this theological centre to our lives here's number one here's the big two big lessons that we learn here number one is this Jesus died so that there would be one church he died so that there would be one church come with me to verse 11 just in case you're confused with the language there

Cephas is Peter it's the same guy and Peter is someone who Paul has just esteemed back at verse 9 of chapter 2 as one of the pillars of the early church do you see him call him that a pillar because his eyewitness testimony to Jesus and his teachings who he was up and saw everything close and personal for three years this is the bedrock on which the witness of the church is built Peter Cephas has made his way to where do you see the place the geography he's made his way to Antioch now Antioch is important in the life of the early church because it is if you like the base of the international spreading of the gospel to the nations it's also the place where people are first called Christians and I love that because according to the Bible a Christian is not a box that you tick that is not what it means to be a Christian a Christian is a nickname that you get because of the kind of life that people see that you live to be a Christian if you want to be technical it literally means little Christ and so that's what people in this city this multicultural Gentile city of Antioch they looked at the early Christians and they gave them that name you are little Christ and it's Peter's behaviour there in that city that's caused the issue come with me to verse 12 do you see Peter was eating with the Gentiles now the Greek grammar of that word suggests that this wasn't just a one-off thing this was something that he had done on a regular basis he was eating with them now that might not appear a big deal to us but can

I just maybe slam on the brakes for a minute and help us see that that is massive it is massive to eat with someone in this day kind of still is today but much more in that day is to welcome somebody into your life and even approve of somebody and that's why you can make a good case in Luke's gospel that is exactly why Jesus is killed because he's eating with the wrong kind of

people eating with somebody in this day is a massive thing and Jews didn't eat with Gentiles but Peter has this vision in Acts chapter 10 you can maybe scribble it down and look at it in your own time of a sheep coming down from heaven and this sheep is full of all sorts of different animals animals that a Jew in Peter's day would never eat but the voice comes from heaven saying rise [13:32] Peter take and eat and again doesn't say it once says it doesn't say twice says it three times because this is so radical the old distinctions are now gone Jesus has smashed the dividing barriers down and the way of salvation they offer a faith is to be offered to the peoples of the world and so Peter's in Antioch back in the context he's eaten with the Gentiles massive deal that is until certain men come from James do you see that so certain men James it's hard to know whether they're legit or not but they have come from supposedly from James who's in Jerusalem Jewish teachers have come up from Jerusalem and they take one look at what Peter is doing eating with the Gentiles and they disapprove massively and in response do you see what Peter does he doesn't just keep on going he stops eating with the Gentiles and he distances himself from them now if you're feeling in a good mood and you're gracious it's possible that it's because he didn't want to cause immediate offense to the

Jews as they react to this I think if you're you're on good ground however if you think much more likely is that he's just scared that these Jews will look on at him and somehow think less of him so reputational damage I think is the thing that's causing Peter to act like he does and what would suggest that is the word at verse 12 that Paul uses and it's the word you see it afraid so Peter withdraws and because Peter withdraws the esteemed pillar do you see Barnabas too watches this verse 13 he does the same so Peter's sin here is not heresy he's all on board with faith alone he's a card carrying justification by faith guy he's all in with Jesus if ever there was a guy who knows what it is to have your failures covered by Jesus it's

Peter Peter's sin here is not hypocrisy sorry Peter's sin here is not heresy Peter's sin here is hypocrisy so it's an inconsistency between what he believes and how he acts if I was to phrase this another way do you know what this is this is really simply fear of man something that Paul's already alluded to at verse 10 of chapter 1 fear of man when we're more concerned about what people think of us than about what God thinks of us and that's Peter in this moment he's more concerned about saving face and reputation than he is about being true to the gospel and so Paul sees this happening he sees what the stakes are here if this remains unchallenged now have a think about it if this remains unchallenged what is likely to happen the very real possibility that there may end up being two churches not one a Jewish church and a

Gentile church that the barriers that Christ has shed his blood on the cross to smash down that mankind will raise them back up and the unity that he shed his blood to achieve in his people because we all come to faith by the same way that unity will be thwarted and it all hinges on how this moment goes and that's the hill that Paul is willing to die on because that's never been God's heart to churches God's heart is that there would be one church one church now just notice in passing this is secondary but I think it's really important that we see it notice in passing what this teaches about how Christians do conflict maybe just going for this because of particularly what we've seen this week see what this teaches us about how Christians do conflict what has Paul just called Peter at verse nine come and see this he's called him an esteemed pillar do you see how Paul praises Peter behind his back you see it and how he challenges him to his face friends what are we so tempted to do when it comes to conflict and challenge we are tempted to do it the other way around what comes naturally to us is to praise someone to their face and yet challenge them behind their back and see that this is not how the spirit of God would have us do it you know

[19:36] I had a lecturer at uni he always said this and I've never forgotten it he always said it is possible to do Jesus like work in non Jesus like ways think on that it is possible to do Jesus like work in non Jesus like ways so true so true I've been praying this week in my own heart and the life of ours is one body that God would convict us of the times when we fall foul of this when we speak well of people to their face and we speak poorly of them behind their back we're speaking about others in a way that just isn't honouring to God you know Erin about a new generation and she said what do people crave these days more than anything else she said one word she said authenticity and even this week with

Charlie Kirk has reminded us of our culture's inability at times to handle conflict and Paul models for us here how to be someone with both deep conviction!

hard deal it's not a 50/50 deal we need to be people of both conviction and character they're always going together always going together and just while we're there on this whole fear of man thing friends I'm so conscious that for many of us this is a time of new starts right new term new job new school year new neighbors new friends new flatmates in terms of nailing your colors to the mast for Jesus do you know what life has taught me over the years is that the first chance you get is the best chance you'll get speaking of someone who's made so many mistakes over the years the years the first chance you get is the best chance you'll get so be brave trust the spirit and take the opportunity Jesus died friends so that there would be one church one church and second from verse 17 Jesus died so that there would be a new you a new new and it's almost as if Paul having laid out the middle the middle of the riddle he gets out ahead of an objection that he can see coming because he knows at verse 17 and that's what the speech marks are he's quoting what someone might say he knows that people might say Paul your gospel man is way too easy way too easy if it's simply a case of putting your faith in Jesus and not doing anything then what on earth is the motivation for obedience legitimate question have you not heard of Pavlov and his dogs probably went off because it's a bit ahead of his time but you get what I'm saying have you not heard of Pavlov and his dogs do you not know how human beings work Paul your gospel is all carrot and no stick that's the accusation to which

Paul says come with me to verses 19 and 20 which are some of the most treasured! verses in all of the Bible Paul says that's what you think then you haven't understood just how deep a transformation the Holy Spirit brings about in someone's life now you remember this guy Paul back at chapter 1 verses 13 to 17 he gave us a little bit we thought about this a few weeks ago a little bit of his story and we thought about the fact that there's nothing that explains a U-turn quite like that other than this gospel being true friends this is all about what we understand a Christian to be these verses and if your faith is in

[24 : 04] Jesus today no matter what you've come in here with no matter how you're feeling no matter what life is throwing! about you right now then this tells you the purpose that God has for your life a Christian and maybe I'll put it like this maybe just a little bit different to help us think about just what he's saying here come with me okay a Christian according to these verses is someone who in the course of their life will have two funerals and just in case you're thinking that sounds really expensive let me explain unless Jesus returns before we die if our faith is in him there's the funeral friends that you and I will have at the end of our lives when we die we will go to be with Jesus spiritually whilst our physical bodies will be in the ground waiting for Jesus to return and to usher in the new heavens and the new earth when he will raise our physical bodies from the dead we will be united to our souls we will live for him forever that's funeral two but funeral one is the funeral of the pre

Jesus old you so when someone says have you ever met Graham Shanks the response is well which Graham Shanks are you talking about are you talking about the 1985 to the circa 2002 Graham Shanks because that Graham Shanks is dead I don't know him anymore or are you talking about the circa 2002 Graham Shanks to the dot dot dot Graham Shanks because him I've met do you see what he's saying here how radical a thing it is and how Paul understands himself as a believer you know there's a convenience store that's right opposite our house I remember walking in a few months back and thinking to myself wow this place looks different amazing what a lick of paint can do losing a few middle aisles so the place feels a bit more spacious new price labels new brands on offer and I said to the guy behind the till

I said mate loving this what's going on here and he simply said three words back to me under new ownership under new ownership and that's exactly what Paul was saying here when Paul writes and this is how he considers himself remember now as a Christian united to Jesus see that language coming coming across here he says I have been what do you see crucified with Christ wow wow of course this is what baptism is isn't it I've been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but the son of God now lives in me have you ever thought about the fact that a baptism is a funeral service of the old you chuck it out there it is true for him it's true for every believer Jesus the son of God see what he calls

Jesus there it's almost as if Paul needs to remind himself and us of exactly who it was who died for us who came for us the son of God no less God gave his son God gave his son who loved us before we loved him who had us in our eye before we had him in ours who gave himself for us the powerless us the lost in darkness us the unable to save ourselves us and what this means now is

that our lives are brimming with God glorifying purpose what is that purpose look at verse 19 the purpose is that you and I if our faith is in Jesus the old is gone the new has come the spirit lives in us that you and

I would what might live for God wherever he's put us whoever's around us whatever's in front of us that we might live for God and so we see come back to what Paul says if you think that there's no carrot and no stick with this gospel you haven't grasped just how deep a transformation Jesus brings in someone's life I don't obey because I have to I obey because it's who I am that wonderful hymn by William Cowper some of you might remember singing it when you were little about how Christ changes duty into choice and so here is the question then that we're battling with and thinking about and journeying with each other through the rest of the

[29 : 37] Christian life what does it mean wherever God has put us right now and with whatever God has given us right now to live out that new identity in our spheres right think about it think about it whatever you are what does it mean for you to live for the glory of God wherever he has put you there's no person that's coming into your life that is a coincidence there's no opportunity that's coming your way that's a coincidence there's no trial that's coming your way that's a coincidence when you believe in a God as good and as sovereign as this and when you understand that the spirit lives in us for this purpose friends what part of the old us is still lingering in our lives like a bad smell in the toilet and needs to die and what is true of the new us the one that

Jesus died to enliven that we need to believe and live out in our bodies and that's a great question to take to your growth group this week oh friends do you see just moving in to wrap this up God's heart is that there would be one church and Jesus died so that there would be a new you and can I just bring those things together just as we close one church transformation new us do you know a question that people always ask me at school here's the question are you blue or are you green and I always enjoyed telling people with pride that I was very much white strip red diamond you can figure that out in your own time with pride I told people that given how this season's going it's more loyalty than pride but we'll run with it but that whole blue green question see if you know the history of that growing up in Glasgow if you know the history of that great divide you will know that it really is nothing compared to the heights of the troubles that happened in Northern Ireland back in the 70s onwards!

Epitomized at the time by the emergence of these two enemy groups fighting on either side the Irish Republican Army on the one side and the Ulster Volunteer Force fighting on the other side and this is where you get I remember one of the first albums I owned I think it was war albums that I owned was war by U2 U2 had that song called Sunday Bloody Sunday and it kind of captured the spirit the feeling of the the nation that line if you remember it from that song Sunday Bloody Sunday the trenches dug within our hearts and mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart but let me take you from Northern Ireland in the 70s onwards to a church planting weekend run by our friends at 20 Schemes in Nidre a few years back and two guys are sitting down having dinner and at some point they both take their jumpers off and they both notice that they have tattoos up their forearms and here's the picture one guy, do you see it, has an IRA tattoo and the other guy has a UVF tattoo and they take a picture of it and they put it on Twitter

I guess it's now X along with the following words the picture right here is the power of the gospel once both enemies now joined together in fellowship in Jesus Christ and here's a hashtag for the ages the gospel has no borders friends, do you see how no law as good as it is as good as it is could ever knock down barriers as strong as that and do you see how no peace talks as welcome as they are could ever overcome hatred as deep as that but Paul's gospel the message of Jesus his message of justification by faith in Jesus and that subsequent subsequent transformation by the work of the spirit internally it can

I'm so glad that Paul was prepared to die on this hill because believe me the church today will look very very different if he hadn't because God's heart Jesus died so that there would be one church and Jesus died so that there would be a new you I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me the life I now live in the body I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me and so Father I pray that the gospel today the news of who Jesus is and what he's done for us and what's ahead of us Lord I pray that that would come as a balm to our souls today would your Holy Spirit take that message and apply it in the exact way that you know we need to hear it today would for some of us be the be it be the thing that lifts us up it lifts us up

[35 : 43] Lord for some of us it may well be the thing that causes us to think about how we're living but Father I pray that whatever is going on in our lives today we would take with both of our eyes a fresh look at Jesus today so Father we thank you for your love for us expressed in the giving of your son and it's in his precious name that we pray Amen