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**"Justification by Faith, Part 1"**  
**(Galatians 2:11-21)**  
**Pastor Peter Yi**  
**April 9, 2017**

**(Galatians 2:11-21)**

<sup>11</sup> When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

<sup>14</sup> 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?"

<sup>15</sup> "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles <sup>16</sup> 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 and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup> "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup> If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

<sup>19</sup> "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> 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. <sup>21</sup> I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Here's how I'd like to proceed with this sermon. Because we have our children with us today, I want to explain what is going on in this passage and then at the end of the sermon I'll draw out some implications.

This letter was written by the Apostle Paul to the church in Galatia. He wrote this letter because a very serious problem was going on with the church in Galatia. The main problem wasn't about some kind of bad behaviour like it was the case with the church in Corinth. He wasn't writing to address some scandal or immorality or divisiveness. The main reason he is writing is to address a huge error in doctrine, which was in turn affecting their behaviour. Here's what was happening. False teachers had infiltrated the Christian church in Galatia and these false teachers were Jewish Christians, but they were supposed Jewish Christians who misunderstood how a person is saved or made right with God. So, if someone were to ask you, "How can I be made right with God, how can I be saved" there is a right answer and there is a wrong answer. The Jewish Christians that had come into the church were saying to the Gentile Christians that we agree that it is through faith in Jesus Christ, his death and resurrection that a person is made right with God, but there's one small detail that the Galatians had forgotten—circumcision.

The Jewish custom was that every boy, shortly after they are born, are to be circumcised. So, these Jewish Christians were telling the Gentile Christians in Galatia that they too must be circumcised as well, then they will be true Christians. So, what they were doing was this: what you need to be saved is the Gospel **plus** circumcision. Are you following me?

The Apostle Paul sees this as a very serious problem and so he writes this letter. He's so alarmed by what's happened he tells us in chapter 1 that if anyone tells you another gospel than the Gospel message that Paul has given to them, and that anyone could be another human being or even an angel, he says, let them be under God's curse, which means, let them be judged by God. This is how serious Paul sees the problem.

Then Paul mentions an encounter he had at the church in Antioch with Cephas, which is another name for the Apostle Peter. Peter was doing something that was not in line with the Gospel. At first Peter was doing the right thing. He was having true and genuine table fellowship with both Jewish and Gentile Christians. But after these false teachers came from James, (which is the same James that wrote the letter of James, which is the James that was the leader of the Christian Church in Jerusalem) Peter started acting differently. The passage tells us that he withdrew from the Gentile Christians and began to hang out only with the Jewish Christians. This likely occurred after these people visiting from James began spreading their message.

If you remember, the Apostle Peter is the same Peter in Acts chapter 10 who saw the vision of a sheet coming down from heaven and on that sheet were foods that he, as a Jew, was not allowed to eat, but in the vision the Lord tells Peter to eat it. And, Peter begins to argue with the Lord telling him that he has never eaten any of the forbidden foods. And then the Lord says, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." Now, was this vision primarily about food? No, it was about the Gospel. It was a message to Peter, to tell him that all peoples, Jews and non-Jews, can hear the Gospel and be saved. How do we know that? Because the vision occurs in the middle of a story about a Gentile named Cornelius. After the vision, there's a knock at Peter's door and standing there are men sent by Cornelius. Peter goes with the men, and when he arrives at Cornelius's house, it's full of his friends and relatives. Peter says,

<sup>28</sup> He said to them: "You are well aware that it is against our law for a Jew to associate with or visit a Gentile. But God has shown me that I should not call anyone impure or unclean.

So, even Peter interpreted the vision this way. It really had nothing to do with food and had everything to do with race.

Well, long story short, Peter shares the Gospel in this manner.

<sup>42</sup> He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. <sup>43</sup> All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name." (**Acts 10:42–43 NIV11-GK**)

If you notice, there's no mention of circumcision, there's no extra step. All he says they need to do is believe.

Well upon hearing the Gospel, all the gathered people become saved. This was one of the first accounts of a group of Gentiles coming to faith in Jesus Christ.

This same Peter is the one that Paul is confronting in the letter to the Galatians. Paul confronts him publicly for not acting in a manner that is consistent with the Gospel. Paul says Peter was motivated by fear of what the Jewish group might think of him. What Peter did was nothing short of hypocrisy, being a fake, being inconsistent. And his behaviour led others astray, even Barnabas.

Paul then enters into an explanation of how a person is made right with God. In verse 16 he says, [We] 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 and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

In no uncertain terms Paul tells us how a person is justified. First let's understand what the word *justified* actually means. It means to make someone righteous, which means to make someone not guilty before God. So, when God looks upon sinful creatures like you and me, what he sees is our sin, he sees our disobedience, he sees that we have violated and broken and disobeyed his holy commands. So when God looks at us he says, "guilty!" Paul is telling us that there is a way for God to look at us and then to declare to us, in his heavenly courtroom the words, "not guilty!" That's what it means to be justified. How can we who are guilty be declared not guilty, how can we be justified?

Again, what does it say in verse 16?

[We] 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 and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

Let's spend some time picking apart this very important verse. Paul says, we Jewish Christians know that a person is not justified by works of the law. A person doesn't become a Christian by going through a religious ritual like circumcision, or by obeying any of the other commands. It is impossible for sinners like us to be made right with God because we are law breakers. So no matter how hard we try, no matter how many laws we obey, even if it's 99.9% of the laws we were to obey, that would not get us right with God. Why? Because God is 100% holy and the bible says that when we break one of the commands of God it's as if we've broken all of them. Why? Because Jesus told us to be perfect just as our heavenly father is perfect. Because we are not basically good people who once in a while sins, but we are sinful people who sin all the time. The problem isn't merely that we sin, the problem is that by nature we are sinners. All of humanity have inherited Adam's curse, we were born with a sin nature.

How then is a person justified? Paul tells us so clearly -- By faith in Jesus Christ. Three times in this verse Paul mentions faith in Jesus Christ. And three times in the same verse Paul says one is not justified by works of the law. What exactly does it mean to believe that you are justified by faith alone?

Let me give you some verses:

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (**John 3:16 NIV11-GK**)

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. (**John 6:40 NIV11-GK**)

But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name. (**John 20:31 NIV11-GK**)

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. (**Rom 4:24; 10:9 NIV11-GK**)

What does it mean to believe?

1. It means that you cannot save yourself.
2. It means that not a single good work contributes to your salvation.
3. It means you believe that when Jesus lived his 33 years of perfect obedience, he lived it on your behalf.
4. It means you believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he died for your sins. He died to be punished by a holy God for your sins.
5. It means you believe that he rose again from the dead to say that the sin payment has been made it full and that he has conquered the curse of sin, which is death.
6. It means to thrust yourself upon Jesus and Jesus alone to be your Savior.
7. It means to give yourself over to Jesus, to give him your heart, your will, your mind, and your life.

Now, let's look at some of the implications from this passage:

1. The Gospel "plus" something else, anything else, no matter how big or small, whether it's one addition or a thousand, is no gospel at all, it is a false gospel. Many Christians, to their harm, have said things like, "Why are splitting hairs over this?" "Why can't we just put matters of doctrine and theology aside, and pursue peace and justice together." "Doesn't theology divide? So let's not get hung up on theology." Is that how Paul looked at it? Did Paul look at what the Galatians were doing, at what the false teachers were doing and say, "Ahh, they're close enough, let's just let it slide." For sure there are things to Paul that are peripheral, secondary and there are things that are central, non-negotiable. And the most important of all are Gospel issues. Let me give you an example. We all are aware that much of society and even the Christian church have changed their view toward the sinfulness of homosexual acts. Many denominations have changed their positions like the Anglican church of Canada, the PCUSA, and now the PCC has it on their agenda. About 5 years ago when I was trying to gain greater understanding about this issue, I came across a video of someone interview theologian and churchman J.I. Packer, who was a member of the Anglican Church in Canada. And the interviewer asked him. Why is the issue of homosexuality such an important matter for the church? His answer was something like this. "Because it's a Gospel issue." Affirming or denying homosexual behaviour is a Gospel issue. It puts the Gospel at stake. He went on to elaborate why Christians couldn't endorse that kind of behaviour, because it would be denying the transformative power of the Gospel. In accepting homosexuality you were conceding that the Gospel was void of the power to transform. We too must be very vigilant to make sure that we do not compromise the Gospel in any way.
2. Heaven and hell depend on us getting the Gospel right. Paul is so adamant that we don't mess this one up. We have to get it right because if we communicate a wrong Gospel people will not be saved. Our salvation and every other person's salvation hinges upon the correct doctrine of Justification by Faith. For example, in the letter to the Philippians it's really interesting what he says.  
(Phil 1:15–18 NIV11-GK) "15 It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. 16 The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the Gospel. 17 The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. 18 But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice."  
Here's what Paul is getting at. Of course we should preach the Gospel out of pure and right motives, but even if it's preached with bad motives, so long as it's the correct Gospel, as long as Christ is preached, he rejoices. So right Gospel with bad motives is preferred a thousand times over to wrong Gospel with good motives.

3. Even leaders can be led astray from the true Gospel. Peter, an Apostle, was even led astray from the true Gospel. Nowhere in all of the New Testament will we find a public rebuke of an Apostle. And that's coming from Paul, the newest of the Apostles, one who is not even one of the original twelve, but he has to call it like it is, so he confront Peter, the chief apostle, publicly, to his face that he is in error.

That of course means that all of us can be susceptible to false gospels. So we must be vigilant and careful. The temptation is to think that the Gospel is too good to be true. Or that the Gospel needs to be improved upon. Or that since I've been saved by the free grace of the Gospel, I should get on with paying back God with good works. Being saved by the Gospel always leads to good works, but the motivation for our good works is not to pay God back, it's not to pay back the debt. It can never be paid back. Our obedience, our good works is the natural overflow of a heart that's been touched by love. Because we've been loved, we in turn love God with our good works and obedience.

4. Our errors will inevitably result in leading others astray. We are told that others were led astray and even Barnabas, a great leader, Paul's discipler, Paul's spiritual mentor was even led astray. Parents, teachers, LG leaders, Discipleship leaders, campus leaders, in fact all of us, consider how important is it that we get the Gospel right, lest we lead others astray.
5. Gospel truths must lead to consistent Gospel behaviours, especially as it concerns our relationships. Or to see it the opposite way, Gospel errors will lead to incorrect behaviours. This is what happened to Peter. One of the ways we can see if a person truly gets the Gospel is by looking at their relationships. Listen to how Paul addressed the believers at Corinth.

"So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view."  
And then Paul says a chapter later in Galatians(**2 Cor 5:16 NIV11-GK**)

There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. (**Gal 3:28 NIV11-GK**)

When we truly get the Gospel, when we are truly changed by the Gospel we no longer look at people through a worldly lens that divides by race, gender, class, economics, external appearance, social awkwardness, and so on. We begin to forgive our friends and even our enemies. We begin to love people with the love of Christ. We have unimaginable generosity and kindness toward people.

This is the true Gospel. This is what justification by faith looks like. This is why it is so important. Friends, have you been justified by faith? Have you trusted in only one, only in Jesus Christ, his life, death and resurrection, or are you trusting in something else. Leave it all behind and turn to Jesus alone.

Let's pray.