

True Freedom: Walk the Walk

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[0 : 00] Well, I read a news article and it had this title. It said, North Carolina Church wanted only white people as greeters. North Carolina Church wanted only white people as greeters.

And it was picked up by the news media in the United States. And it was about a church in North Carolina where one of their pastors apparently sent an email to the volunteers in church. And he said, we would like to ask that only white people be on the front doors. And an outraged church member who received this email then sent it to the local radio station, the local news station. And then this led to the pastor rightly apologizing and confirming the church's commitment to diversity to ensure that nothing like this ever happened again. Now, I'm sure that you are also equally outraged by such behavior.

Because the conduct of that particular church leader denied the very gospel of Jesus Christ that he professed to believe. And the sad reality is that church leaders do get it wrong.

[1 : 10] If we profess to be a Christian, we also get it wrong. You won't be surprised at hearing that Christians are and can be hypocrites. And this really gives us an angle into our Bible reading today.

Because what we see in Galatians 2 is the Apostle Paul, sorry, the Apostle Peter behaving in a way that denied the gospel. He was being a hypocrite.

Why was he being a hypocrite? Well, as a Jew, Peter had stopped eating with Gentile believers.

And so then Paul had to confront Peter with his hypocritical behavior.

And it wasn't just over a racial or a cultural issue. Peter was wrong because he was betraying the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

If you're just joining us, remember the context of Galatians. There were some Jewish false teachers and they were distorting, twisting the gospel message of Jesus Christ. They were insisting that as well as having faith in Jesus, the Gentile believers also had to observe the Old Testament laws, like circumcision.

[2 : 18] And they had to observe these if they were to be a proper Christian. And so that's why Paul emphasizes here that we're accepted by God through faith in Jesus, not by observing the law.

So last time, if you were here, chapter 2, verse 1 to 10, we saw how the apostles united around this gospel of grace. That's why Robbie prayed that in the prayer before this.

They were united around the good news, the message of Jesus. But now what we see, verse 11 to 21 of chapter 2, is that Peter may have been talking the talk, but he wasn't actually walking the walk.

And so in correcting Peter, Paul essentially gets to what is at the very heart or core of Christianity. He gets to the gospel of grace.

And that is that we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by anything we do ourselves, but through faith in Christ alone. And so if we would profess to be a Christian, we don't just need to believe this, but we also need to live it out.

[3 : 25] And the gospel we believe is also what we need for living the Christian life, living the life of faith, living so that we're not a hypocrite. But we don't just talk the talk, but we also walk the walk.

And so this afternoon, we're going to look at these three points that are on the screen. First of all, denying the truth of the gospel. That's what Peter was doing. Secondly, knowing the truth of the gospel. It's what we all need to do.

And then thirdly, living the truth of the gospel. How, when we know it and believe it, how it should work itself out in our lives. So denying, knowing, and living. So first, denying the truth of the gospel. Verse 11 to 14. Paul confronted Peter because he was wrong. So verse 11 says, Now I guess you don't expect that the two leading apostles would clash and Paul would need to confront Peter.

But Paul cared more about the truth of the gospel. That was more important than avoiding conflict. If you're like me, you probably want to avoid conflict.

[4 : 36] Or maybe you're quite happy getting stuck into conflict. But Paul has to confront Peter here because he is clearly in the wrong. Peter's behavior was denying the gospel he believed.

He was being a hypocrite. Why? Paul says, 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.

So Peter clearly knew the gospel. He knew about Jesus Christ and how he, as a believer, because of faith in him, he knew it in his head.

He was aware that Jews and Gentiles were accepted by God through faith in Jesus. And God even gave Peter a vision of this. In Acts chapter 10, a sheet of unclean animals came down from heaven. And God was telling Peter that nobody is unclean in Christ. Jews, Gentiles can all be united in Christ. And so God was showing this to him. And that's why Peter was happy to eat with Gentiles.

[5 : 42] But then suddenly he stopped and he separated himself from the Gentiles and he only would eat with Jews. His own race, his own kind.

I guess. So the church barbecue, they're all there. It's a nice day. Peter doesn't sit beside the uncircumcised Gentiles and enjoy pulled pork with them. Instead, he goes off and he reverts back to his old Jewish practices.

And he hangs out with the Jews thinking that these Gentiles are unclean because they don't follow all the Jewish laws. And so basically, Peter was sending out this message that these Jewish practices were so important that they were essential for Gentile believers.

And so why this change of behavior for Peter? Well, Peter was afraid. He was afraid of a group of people. Paul calls them the circumcision group. So no prizes for guessing what their agenda was. They wanted Gentile Christians to observe all the Jewish laws, including circumcision, because they were saying, fair enough, you've got faith in Jesus.

[6 : 48] But you also need to do all of these things as well to be a proper Christian. So perhaps Peter wanted to keep in with this group, making sure he didn't offend them. But his fear of people made him deny the gospel of Jesus Christ.

He was a hypocrite. So Peter knew it in his head. He believed it in his heart. He confessed it with his lips. But he denied it in his life. And his fear didn't just make him a hypocrite.

He also had the knock-on effect of leading other people astray as well. So we read in verse 13, the other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray. That's how influential Peter was. When he stopped eating with the Gentiles, other Jews, other believers stopped eating with Gentiles too. So their actions undermined the belief that both Jewish and Gentile believers are united through faith, by faith, in Jesus.

And it was damaging because this wasn't just a difference of opinion within the church. It was right at the very heart or very core of Christianity. So verse 14, So their conduct, Paul's saying, is out of step, Peter's especially, with the truth of the gospel.

[8 : 22] And that's why Paul has to confront Peter publicly. Remember, Peter's separation from the Jews was a public thing. It was obvious that Peter was no longer hanging out with the people he used to hang out with before.

And so Paul has to confront Peter in a very public way. And so before we move on to our second point, there are two applications, I think, here, if we'd call ourselves a Christian.

There's a Peter application and there's a Paul application. So fly away, Peter. Come back, Paul. Whatever the nursery rhyme is. But the Peter application is this, essentially. It's don't deny the gospel of Jesus Christ because of fear and hypocrisy.

So if you or I profess to be a Christian, we need to be aware of when we don't act in line with the truth of the gospel. In other words, we need to know when we're being a hypocrite.

When we might talk the talk, but we don't walk the walk. Because the way we live, either by what we do or by what we don't do, can be a denial of the gospel message of Jesus that we claim to believe.

[9 : 30] Because it's possible to know the gospel in our heads, to believe it in our hearts, to confess it with our lips, and yet still deny it with our lives.

But why do we do this? Well, it might be that we were afraid of other people or we're afraid of what other people might think of us. And that's why Peter separated himself from the Gentiles.

But if we then separate ourselves from anyone, say in church, then we are just as guilty of the same hypocrisy. Because if we like to just hang out with people who are just like us, and we avoid those who are different from us, or we feel uncomfortable around others who aren't like us, then we're being hypocritical.

And the differences might be because of race, or culture, or age, or because of social or economic reasons. There's lots of things that differentiate us as people.

And of course, yeah, we would sit next to people politely in church. But what do our actions say the rest of the week? Would we eat together with some people who are different from us?

[10:42] Would we socialize together? Would we develop friendships with people who are different? Or do we just like to only share our lives and be with people who are essentially like ourselves?

Because our behavior will be out of line, out of step with the truth of the gospel. If for whatever reason, we decide we can't associate with certain people.

So is there a sense of fear that leads to hypocrisy in how we live our lives? So that's the Peter application. But secondly, there's also the Paul application.

And that is defend the gospel at all costs. So we shouldn't fail to deal with an issue, or even a person, when the truth of the gospel is at stake.

Because it's the responsibility of every believer to make sure that we are in line with the truth of the gospel. First of all, for ourselves, we need to practice what we preach, as it were.

[11:43] But also, we need to make sure others are in line with the truth of the gospel. And that might involve public confrontation with other people. Paul couldn't just let Peter continue in his hypocrisy when Peter was clearly in the wrong.

Paul had to take action for the sake of the gospel. And so we shouldn't delude ourselves into thinking that by keeping our mouths shut, that means we're being wise, when in reality we might just be being weak.

Because a sit-back-and-do-nothing approach would have been disastrous for the church, for the Gentile believers here in Galatians. And so we don't help anyone in the long run if we fail to defend the truth of the gospel.

If we think it doesn't matter, the results will be disastrous. So it's always going to be necessary to defend the truth of the gospel, and it will often be costly as well.

Okay, so let's just move on then. Second point. First point, denying the truth of the gospel. The second point is knowing the truth of the gospel. So the issue here wasn't just about who you ate with.

[12:53] Okay? It went deeper than racial or cultural differences. Because it's all about what puts us, you, me, right with God. And so in these central verses in Galatians, and they're quite key, verse 15 and 16, to understanding the whole letter.

In these central verses, Paul is emphasizing that it is salvation by faith in Jesus Christ. And not by works of the law. So we'll see what he says, verse 15 and 16.

We who are Jews by birth and 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 and not by the works of the law.

Because by the works of the law, no one will be justified. Okay, so this is Paul's point here. These verses are crucial, not just in getting to the heart of the message of Galatians, but getting to the heart of what Christianity is all about.

So if you're considering Christianity, if you're skeptical, if you have got doubts about Christianity, if you're not sure what it means to be a Christian, these verses really help. Because they're reminding us that it's not about what you do that means God accepts you, but it's about what Jesus Christ has done.

[14:12] And we need to put our faith in Jesus and what he has done. That's how God accepts us. And that's Paul's point. Whether Jew or Gentile, slave, free, you, me, we're put right with God through faith in Jesus Christ alone.

And so Paul really unfolds what is called by theologians the doctrine of justification by faith. And it's quite simple. Justified is a legal term.

It was back then. It still is today. It's a legal term. It's from the law courts. It means to be counted righteous or declared righteous. It's the not guilty verdict that we hear in court.

It is to be innocent, acquitted, cleared of all charges. And it's the exact opposite of condemnation. And so in the biblical sense, to be justified is to be declared righteous before God. Describes God's grace whereby he puts a sinner right with himself. And if we break up the word justified, just think of it in your mind, justified, it helps to explain the meaning.

[15 : 20] It is just as if we had never sinned. As if we had perfectly obeyed all God's commandments. Of course, we're still a sinner.

But God declares us to be righteous through and by faith in Jesus. And this is what Paul wants to drill home. And so he's basically saying the same thing here, saying the same thing in three different ways, using the same language.

He says, A person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus. The works of the law would be the kind of Jewish ceremonial customs that you read about in the Old Testament.

He's saying you're not justified by keeping all of these things, but by faith in Jesus. So Paul's describing how everybody, Jew, Gentile, is put right with God. How everybody can be accepted by God.

It is by faith in Jesus Christ alone. There's no way anyone could ever keep the laws of the Old Testament in order to be justified before God.

[16 : 25] And so what faith means is basically a complete surrendering of ourselves to Jesus Christ by accepting what Jesus has done for us.

And not by trying to do things for ourselves so we can earn God's acceptance. And so we're not depending on our own good works to be saved.

But rather we're depending on the work that Jesus has done on the cross in order to be saved. And so Paul goes on to say, 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.

And that's a reminder for Peter that Peter and Paul were both justified by faith in Jesus. So then why ever would Peter behave as if the Gentiles needed more than just faith in Jesus in order to be justified?

And so as if Paul hadn't stated it strongly enough, he repeats himself again by saying, By the works of the law, no one will be justified. He's saying there's absolutely no chance of anyone being acceptable to God by the things that they do.

[17 : 36] And I guess that's such a common belief in society today, isn't it? That if you're good enough, if you do enough, if you go to church enough, if you read your Bible enough, if you give to charity enough, if you're a good person, then surely God will accept you on the basis of your goodness.

But Paul's saying, no, we can't be accepted by God through anything we do. We're only accepted by God through what Jesus Christ has done. We're justified by faith in Christ.

And so becoming a Christian means that you don't try to save yourself by your good deeds because you can never do enough. And so the Galatians were tempted to perform these works of the law, like getting circumcised as the way to be accepted by God, which was wrong.

And while it isn't an issue today, circumcision, there are still plenty of other things that people think will help them gain favor with God. And so whoever we are and whatever our religious pedigree, whether we've gone to church all our lives or whether this is our first day in church or second day in church, whatever our background, whatever our upbringing has been, whatever culture or country we have come from, and no matter how much we've racked up by way of good deeds in the past, it doesn't count a single bit towards God's acceptance of us.

Trying to earn our salvation by our good deeds will never, ever work. We can only be justified, put right with God by faith in Jesus Christ.

[19 : 14] Now, Martin Luther, who was the 16th century German reformer, in his commentary on the letter to the Galatians, he wrote about the doctrine of justification by faith, and this is what he said.

And this is the truth of the gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, wherein the knowledge of all godliness consisteth. Writing a long time ago, remember?

And then he says, I love that.

Martin Luther just beat it into their heads continually. This truth, the truth that we are justified by faith, is what Paul needed to beat into Peter's head, because Peter was denying it with his life.

And it's what we need to beat into our heads continually, too. Just think of a vending machine. The vending machine works perfectly well when you put your coin in the slot, and then it drops down, and then you get your chocolate bar, or your packet crisps, or your drink, or whatever.

[20 : 21] But what happens often in the vending machine is you put your coin in, and it gets stuck. It goes down into the machine, but it doesn't quite register. So what do you do?

The first thing is you look around to make sure nobody else is there. Nobody who owns the vending machine is there. And then you whack the vending machine on the side as hard as you possibly can, or even just push it slightly, so that the coin drops and clicks and registers.

And it finally drops, and then you can get your snack. And it can often be like that with the truth of the gospel of Jesus Christ, because it can be in there.

We can know it in our heads. We can have heard about it. We can understand it. And yet it can not fully have sunk into our hearts. And so while we might know it, while we might confess it with our lips, we can still deny it by our lives.

It needs to be beat into our heads, so that it sinks into our hearts, so that our lives are very different as a result. And so that takes us to our third point, which is living the truth of the gospel.

[21 : 30] So Paul's argument has been, we're not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So what does that mean for how you then live your life if you call yourself a Christian?

Well, here Paul outlines the difference the truth of the gospel makes to our living. And so he starts by dealing with the obvious objection to justification by faith in verse 17.

He says, 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. If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

So justification by faith, it raises a problem. And so the logic would be, if God in his grace has already justified us, then what is the point of even trying to obey God or to avoid sin?

One commentator says it's a bit like winning the spiritual lottery. Because if salvation is God's free gift to us, then there's no incentive to live for God.

[22 : 38] So in Paul's words, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Just think of this illustration. Just imagine, and this is good for you teenagers, just imagine the government said, OK, when you finish school, you will get to choose a course of your choice, college, university, whatever.

And then when you finish that course of your choice, then you'll get a job guaranteed at the end. And we're guaranteeing that right now. So whether you're 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, or 18, we're guaranteeing that your future is sorted.

Well, do you think that teenagers would then decide that it's a good thing to still go home and do their homework or even still go to school?

Of course not. Why bother? If it's already sorted, if it's already done, if it's already guaranteed, then what is the point of doing any kind of work? And that's the kind of objection that Paul is responding to here when it comes to being justified by faith in Christ.

Because if we can't contribute a single thing to our salvation, if all we need to do is put our faith in Jesus, then doesn't that just encourage us to sin? Why try?

[23 : 48] But Paul says, absolutely not. Justification by faith doesn't mean that you're free to do whatever you like. And so then Paul says, here's what it really means to be a lawbreaker.

Verse 18, if I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. He's saying that if you try to introduce the law again, then you only end up condemning yourself.

Because the law has been knocked down, he says, as the way of salvation. And it's been knocked down by the gospel of faith in Christ alone. So the law is in the blue corner. The gospel is in the red corner.

The red corner comes and thumps the blue corner. There's lots of thumping and beating analogies in the sermon today. I don't know why. But the gospel comes and defeats the law. And so Paul is saying, well, if you try and keep the law, it's a crazy thing to do because you'll never be able to keep it.

You'll only end up becoming a lawbreaker all over again. So he says, verse 19, 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.

[24 : 54] When he says that he died to the law, he means he died to the law as the way of being saved. The law couldn't save him. So before he was a Christian, Paul thought that if he did enough good deeds, if he kept the law right down to the very last letter or word, he thought he could earn his acceptance with God.

But now, as a believer in Jesus, he's been justified by faith. He's saying he now lives to please God. And here's the difference. Before, for Paul, he tried to do good works so that God would accept him. But now he realizes that because God has accepted him, he wants to do good works. Not in order to be accepted, but because he already is. He's got a new motivation for living out his life.

And so he says, verse 20, When Paul says that he's been crucified with Christ, what he means is that he is united with Christ.

He's talking about his union with Jesus. And it's a living union because Paul now lives in a new way with Jesus. And so Paul's not just been justified by faith in Jesus, but now he lives by faith in Jesus.

[26 : 23] Because the gospel of grace is not just what we need to enter into the Christian life, how we become a Christian, the ABC, if you like. The gospel of grace is also the way we continue as a Christian.

So it's the A to Z of the Christian life. It's the way into the Christian life, but it's also the way to continue in the Christian life. And so it's the love of Jesus and dying for Paul that motivates Paul to live for Jesus.

It's because Paul has experienced the love of Jesus personally that he wants to live for him. He says that Jesus loved me and gave himself for me.

Now everyone who believes in Jesus is able to say those words. Because the death of Jesus on the cross isn't some impersonal act that happened way back in history alone.

But Jesus' death is also a personal expression of his love for you and for me. Jesus loved me. Jesus gave himself for me.

[27 : 30] And so now I share his life and want to live for him. I wonder if you can say that. The Son of God loved me and gave himself for me.

Because we'll only be able to say that if we know Jesus personally. If we know that he is our Savior. If we know that he died on a cross to take my sin on himself so that I can be forgiven.

Because it's only when I know the great love of Jesus for me. Only when we know it will we then want to live our lives for him. So being a Christian is about living in line with the truth of the gospel. And the dynamic for this comes from the amazing grace of God. We live for Jesus because of what God has done. So verse 21 says, So Paul is saying here that his opponents had been saying that you could be put right with God through the law.

But Paul says, And that's why Peter's actions are so tragically sad.

[28 : 57] Because by refusing to eat with his fellow Gentile believers. He was essentially suggesting that Jesus died for nothing. It was a waste of time, Jesus dying, if people can get right with God through observing the law.

So what's it all about? Well it's not about what we do. Whether circumcision for the Gentiles or good deeds for us. Because we can't add human works to God's grace.

Because if we are justified by what we do. Then what was the point of Jesus dying? That's what Paul is saying here. And sadly in our world today so many people live their lives believing that they can justify themselves before God.

By their good works. Which makes the death of Jesus pointless for them. But when we realize that we can never be justified by what we do. But only through what Jesus has done.

Then Jesus' death isn't pointless. It is everything to us. It is our only hope in life and death. And it is what will then motivate us to get up each morning and live for him.