

True Grace  
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Galatians 2:11-21

Pop Quiz: Let's reflect on last week's intro to Galatians. **What was going on among the churches Paul had planted in Galatia that prompted his urgent letter? What "fake gospel" was the problem?**

As we move into chapter two Paul gave his readers an account of the events recorded in Acts 12-15 leading up to what is known as the Jerusalem Council (some scholars believe this was a separate meeting with a similar outcome.) At this conference, *"James, Peter, Paul, and Barnabas...and other elders debated whether the Jewish rite of circumcision should be enforced for Gentiles joining the Christian faith. They ultimately decided that Gentile converts could forego being circumcised but should observe Jewish prohibitions on: meat offered to idols; meat of animals killed by strangling; blood; and sexual immorality."*<sup>1</sup>

To summarize, back at the church in Antioch they promised they would NOT try to turn these new, Greek, "baby Christians" into hybrid followers of Christ who also practiced the laws and regulations of Jewish life and heritage. Gentiles were saved as everyone is saved: by grace, through faith in Christ, plus NOTHING.

In the second half of chapter two, Paul reinforces this concept with a true-life story of a confrontation he had with the apostle Peter. It's a lesson on the danger of hypocrisy, the danger of sending mixed signals to people about salvation through grace and not works, and on taking a stand for the true gospel.

Galatians 2:11–21 (ESV)

**Paul Opposes Peter**

<sup>11</sup> But 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 was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. <sup>13</sup> And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. <sup>14</sup> But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

- Even great apostles like Peter and Barnabas were susceptible to giving into the pressure of the "hardline" Jews.
- They went from accepting and fellowshiping with the new gentile converts, to snubbing them. Paul could not let that stand.

- Lesson #1: It's tempting to slip into hypocrisy and discrimination when we face peer pressure. James wrote about this. James 2:9 (ESV) says, "...if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors." That's one lesson, but this is bigger.
- The next few verses are a summary of Paul's rebuke to Peter:

### **Justified by Faith**

<sup>15</sup>We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; <sup>16</sup>yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup>But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! <sup>18</sup>For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. <sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

- In verse 16 Paul restates the true gospel: we are NOT justified by good works or keeping the law, but through faith in Christ.
- In verse 17 he's shooting down an argument these Judaizers might have been making: let this "grace stuff" get out of hand and Jesus would be giving people a "license" to sin, sin, sin, because grace would bail them out. Paul said, "Don't be ridiculous! Jesus would never give us a license to sin. Yes, we will all slip into sin but if we've surrendered to Him we won't be enslaved to our old sinful nature.
- **Why do you think Paul called them out to their faces in public?**
- The essence of Paul's message is in verse 20, a favorite memory verse.
- As born again followers of Christ, it's like we were crucified with Him.
- We don't live this life on our own; if we've accepted His free gift of salvation it's Christ living in us. Like a hand in a glove, if I surrender to Him, He will enable me to live in a way I could never live on my own.
- This proves He loved me and gave Himself for me!
- If I was able to work my way to Heaven by good deeds then "*Christ died for no purpose.*"

So, What's the Takeaway?

Chuck Swindoll gives a great example of how Galatians 2:20 works. He uses the illustration of wishing he could play the piano but only being talented enough to play chopsticks. Then he muses, what if a great pianist could literally inhabit your hands and fingers and play through you?

*"If a great musician were to play through me, the one thing I'd have to do is nothing. Believe me, that part would be hard to pull off! I'd have to consciously let*

*go of my own will and effort, letting the true performer have his way. As long as I consciously sat back and released my own control, I'd be playing Rachmaninoff, Tchaikovsky . . . maybe even a little Franz Liszt! But knowing myself, it wouldn't take long for me to think, Hey, this isn't as hard as I thought. I might make a slight modification here, or do a little improvisation in the middle. As soon as those thoughts intruded, it would immediately be back to "Chopsticks.*

*That's what Paul means by "it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God" (Gal. 2:20). So moment by moment I have to make a simple but all-important choice. I can choose to let Christ's divine life flow through me by trusting Him and cooperating with His gracious empowerment to do what I could never do on my own. Or I could go back to playing "Chopsticks."<sup>ii</sup>*

- We all need to understand for ourselves and convey to others that salvation is not about stacking up good deeds or following rules. It's about yielding to Christ who then comes to live in us through His Holy Spirit.
- When we yield, and when He moves in to live in and through us, our life in Christ will be beautiful music not because of what we can do but because of what He does through us.

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<sup>i</sup> Major Contributors and Editors. (2016). Jerusalem, Council of. In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, ... W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press.

<sup>ii</sup> Swindoll, Charles R.. *Insights on Galatians, Ephesians* (Swindoll's Living Insights New Testament Commentary Book 8) (p. 55). Tyndale House Publishers, Inc.. Kindle Edition."