

“The True Gospel”

Rev. Erika Martinez-Flores
Galatians 2.
June 18, 2023.
Westby & Viroqua UMC

We continue with the series of sermons based on the Letter addressed to the Galatian churches at a time when the grace they knew through the gospel was being distorted, and Paul reacts to how they, in a very short time, had changed the principle of freedom of the gospel, to embrace the law of Moses for salvation. Paul, angry at what is happening, calls them "foolish Galatians." Who has deceived them, how is it that having started with the Spirit now they want to continue by the works of the law?

How is it possible that, having learned the truth, having believed in the truth, having accepted and followed the truth; change your mind wanting to accommodate the truth to our criteria and also live comfortable with it. With what is happening with the Galatians, we see that it is possible to be close to the Lord and move away and feel comfortable with it, continue with our lives and ensure that after all we are not doing so badly and that despite the little commitment that we have with the gospel and the little effort to get closer to God is not really affecting us in our daily lives. And this is the great deception of the devil, it makes us believe that the little we give to God is enough and we gradually move away from Him, believing that there are no great consequences.

In this chapter Paul describes a trip he made to Jerusalem three years after Jesus met him on the road to Damascus. Here he describes a second trip to Jerusalem, fourteen years later. Paul sums up his point: his gospel or his apostolic credentials were not dependent on any kind of approval or influence from men, not even men of influence. He proved that his gospel came by revelation from Jesus and not from man, not even from the apostles in Jerusalem, thus proving that he has the true gospel.

As we can see, Paul continues to defend the gospel, but this time not only against the Judaizers, but also against Peter himself. This is one of the passages most charged with tension, featuring 2 Christians, 2 Apostles of the Lord: Paul vs. Peter.

First of all, it must be taken into account that the Church of Antioch was the 1st Gentile Church, although there were also Jews (Acts 11:19). Antioch was the Missionary Center of the Primitive Church, and there this INCIDENT happened. What was the problem? It was NOT that Peter wanted to impose or place a legalistic yoke on the Gentiles, in fact in the Council of Jerusalem himself Peter fervently defended the gospel of Grace and the message of justification by faith.

Peter knew that both Gentiles and Jews were saved by Grace through Faith in the Person and Work of Jesus, BUT HIS MISTAKE consisted in wavering in the face of the false claims of the Judaizers, that is, at the most precise moment when it is necessary to defend the truth.

The enemy is a true champion in dividing and throughout the history of the church the devil has been very good at dividing the People of God and we, as highly emotional people, do not need much to make enemies with our neighbor, so in every division let us be certain that the hand of God is not there.

If we remember correctly, in this discussion once again it is Peter being Peter. This was the type of behavior that dominated Peter's life before he was transformed by the power of God. This was like Peter telling Jesus not to go to the cross, or Peter taking his eyes off Jesus and sinking as he walked on the water, or like Peter cutting off the ear of the high priest's servant when the soldiers came to arrest Jesus. We see that the flesh was still present in Peter. Salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit did not make Peter perfect; old Peter was still there, only he was seen less often.

In response, Paul reminds Peter that they are justified before God by the work of Jesus, not by the fulfillment of the law, v.16 This is Paul's first use of the great Greek word dikaios (justified, declared just) in his letter to the Galatians. It is a legal concept; the person who is 'justified' is the one who gets the verdict in a court of law. Used in a religious sense it means obtaining a favorable verdict before God on the day of judgment.

Paul knew that even a strictly observant Jew like himself could never be considered righteous before God for what he did under the Law of Moses. So for him, Peter and all Christians it is necessary to believe in Jesus Christ. 'Faith in Jesus Christ', then, is not just intellectual conviction that Jesus lived and died for us, but running to Him for refuge and crying out to Him for mercy.

The gospel that Paul defends is the one that truthfully declares that we are justified before God by faith in Jesus and not by works of the law.

Paul speaks from the depths of personal experience. For him, to redirect the entire fabric of the Law would have been to commit spiritual suicide. With Christ I am crucified together, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me; and what I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not waste the grace of God; for if justice were through the law, then Christ died for nothing.

Paul had tried the way of the Law. He had tried, with all the terrible intensity of his warm heart, to put himself in relationship with God by a life that sought to obey every little detail of that Law, and he had found that such an attempt was unsuccessful. It produced more than a deepening feeling that whatever he could do would never put him right with God. All the Law had done was show him his own helplessness.

So, by the grace of God, he had abandoned that path, and had thrown himself, sinner and all as he was, into the arms of God's mercy. It had been the Law that had led him to the Grace of God. Returning to the Law would only have entangled him totally once again in the feeling of alienation from God.

So great had been the change, that the only way he could describe it was to say that he had been crucified with Christ to die the man he had been, and the living power within him now was Christ himself.