

In the courses that I teach at the community college... there is one activity that I have the students engage in every term... that builds a strong sense of community among them... although it is very temporary. I must say that I really enjoy seeing it develop. As a prelude to teaching on the subject of persuasive speaking... the classes are divided into two groups. Prior to this... they have not worked in groups... but have been completing assignments individually. ... But now they are thrown into a situation in which they share a commonality with about half of the members of their class. They will either have a preference for apples over oranges... or if they are with the other half of the class... they prefer oranges over apples.

Students are told that they must research both fruits... by finding the good about their fruit... and the bad about the other fruit. Then... on an assigned day... we have what is usually a very emotional Apples and Oranges debate... to decide which is the better fruit. Students really invest themselves in downplaying one fruit while lifting up their own.

Wouldn't you agree that the matter of this debate is very inconsequential...? What does it really matter...?

But it is fun to watch how serious both sides get in trying to win this debate... They talk about the better nutritional value their fruit has... how it has been used in history and culture... how it can be used for other things than just for eating... etc. ... But I think what I enjoy most... about this dumb little debate... is to watch... how students... who had been off to themselves all term long... (introverts who come to class every day... and leave class every day... without ever talking to a soul)... are now suddenly interacting and bonding... with fellow students on their team. ... It is

always a turning point of every semester... as every one of these college students now has a strong sense of belonging with others... simply because they either an apple... or an orange... which is (of course) much better than the other fruit. - Go figure!

Where do you look to make you feel like you belong? ... Do you look for people that are similar to you? ... Who fight for the same things that you do? ... Do you look for people that make you feel good about yourself... while eliciting a sense... perhaps... that you are better than others? ... To an extent... I definitely do those things... and you probably do too!

But what Paul presents in our passage today... is that the gospel of Christ forms a new community... where none of those things matter. ... What does matter... is faith in Jesus. ... Faith brings us together. ... We are all so very different... old - young... native Oregonians - displaced Californians... manual laborers - company owners and managers... political conservatives - progressive liberals... King James readers - modern translation readers... Seattle Seahawk fans - (and their counterparts - all others who don't know anything about football.) Faith makes us a new family.

This is why... if you've ever been disappointed with your experience in a church... I'm not surprised. ... What would be a problem... is if you hadn't ever been disappointed. ... That would mean your expectations were way too low. ... What is supposed to happen here is an incredible thing... We are God's Kingdom people. The new kingdom of God. His people on earth.

At one time we were ALL horrible sinners. Not one of us can point a finger at another and say, “You were more repugnant to God than I ever was!” And no one can say of another, “I am more accepted by God because of who I am... or what I’ve done.” But sometimes a believer will come across that way... Even the Apostle Peter did. And Paul had to confront him for it.

Our passage this morning begins with the same story that we ended with last week. ... When Peter... the apostle to the Jews... first visited the church at Antioch... he sat at the same table as the Gentiles. ... But then later he stopped eating with the Gentiles there. ... He acted as though he belonged with a “higher status group” - the Jews... not with those “lesser” Gentiles. ... Paul challenged him... saying that his actions were inconsistent with the gospel. Faith makes us a new family... and Gentileness and Jewishness no longer matter!

Let's return to Galatians 2:14... (the verse we finished with... last week) ... which is probably a direct quote from the actual event... where Paul confronted Peter in Antioch. In the verses that immediately follow... (which are our verses of study for today)... we will see Paul expand on this... as a summary of this confrontation.

Galatians 2:14 - 21

Our passage can be divided into two major sections: **(1)** The Fact of a Common Conversion Experience (vv. 15-16)... and **(2)** The Implications of a Common Conversion Experience (vv. 17-21).

In the first section Paul reminds Peter... that both of them... though Jewish... had come to the common conviction... that Jesus Christ was the agent of salvation in God's plan and... secondly... that they had come to him in faith for that salvation. ... Peter's route to this understanding took several years... of traveling with Jesus... seeing His miracles... listening to His teaching... but it finally... almost all fell into place... when Peter saw Christ resurrected... Peter still had more to process in order to come to the conviction that Paul is reminding him of.

A while after Jesus went back up into Heaven... God gave Peter a vision of a sheet coming down out of Heaven full of unclean things for a Jew to eat. God said, "Peter... it's OK now... take and eat..." Then immediately following the vision... God used Peter to go and lead a Gentile family (Cornelius) to faith in Christ. ... Peter had to go back to Jerusalem... and defend why Cornelius and his family could now be considered one of them... even though they weren't Jewish.

Paul reached this conviction much more suddenly... while he was on the road to Damascus. But Paul... here... reminds Peter... that they both made the very difficult transition... from believing God's plan of salvation was through adherence to Jewish law... to now seeing it as faith in Jesus.

Such in-grained conviction... had to be very difficult to change! ... Coming to Christ... on the basis of faith... without any works... meant that they had to deny the most primary part of their identity... (their very Jewishness.)

Regardless of how hard this perception is for us today, this was the central issue for first-century Jewish converts. Were they, in turning to Christ, abandoning their Jewish heritage, fulfilling it, or simply adding to it?

However... many of you have had to make a similar decision. ... You came from families that go back for generations... of Catholics. ... My wife had to deal with a lot of guilt. She said it was as if she was turning her back on generations of grandparents and great grandparents... some of whom had been martyred for their Catholic faith. She said it was as though she was denouncing her family... treating them as if they meant nothing!

When we first met... her desire was to remain in the Catholic church... But she soon realized THAT meant she would have to continue to do the works that every good Catholic does. ... Not unlike Jewish Law... with its *thousands* of requirements... Catholics insist that you must adhere to 7 sacraments in order to be saved. ... These include such things as... being baptized in the Catholic church... completing a catechism course and being confirmed... attend mass regularly... go to confession... be married only in the catholic church... and having “last rites” said over you just before you die.

So a lot of former Catholics have had the same struggle that Peter went through. “By turning to Christ... am I now a Catholic Christian...? Or simply... just a Christian...?”

Paul makes the point that... Peter's attempt to hold onto the behaviors that defined him as a Jew... denied the Gospel... which says... we are justified by our faith... not by any works that we do. ... Today... Catholic's who turn to Christ... must make the same decision... about clinging to the heritage and behaviors that have defined their whole lives... as Catholics.

But let's turn our attention back... now... to the Jewish – Gentile Controversy... that our passage deals with...

Galatians 2:15

The Jews in that day looked upon the Gentile as a sinner. In fact, Gentile and sinner were synonymous terms. Therefore, the rebuke that Paul gave shows the folly of lawkeeping -- how really foolish it is. ... Jews considered themselves to be righteous (because, as Jews, they were observant of the law) and Gentiles were considered "sinners" (because they neither had the law nor obeyed it).

But Paul used the word "sinners" on purpose here. He said it... ironically... because it was the scornful name Jews applied to Gentiles. ... Peter's actions had conveyed some sort of "holier than thou" attitude in line with the teaching that Gentiles were still "sinners" unless they became Jewish. But both Peter and Paul knew better. This is exactly what Paul declares in verse 16...

Galatians 2:16

This verse will upset every legal system there is today. To say that you have to add anything... to faith in Christ... absolutely mutilates the gospel.

If you say that you have to join a certain church... or that you have to have a certain experience... or that you have to be baptized... be confirmed... or tithe a certain amount... in order to be saved... you are contradicting this verse.

Every religion that I know anything about -- and I have studied many of the cults and religions of this world -- instruct us to... (what ?) ... to **do** something. ... But the Gospel of Christ is different. ... It tells us that we are justified by faith. ... (Listen) Justification is a one-time **accomplished** act. ... Religion says **do**. ... The Gospel of Christ says **done**. ... The great transaction is done... and we are asked to believe it... put our faith on it.

Perhaps no term is more misunderstood in modern evangelicalism than "faith." ... What is this faith that saves us?

As I read Scripture... I have come to define faith... along with others... as *the initial and continual response of trust in, and obedience to, Christ by a person for the purpose of acceptance with God.* ... William Barclay said it well: "Faith is complete trust and complete surrender to Jesus Christ. It is the total acceptance of all that He said, of all that He offered, and of all that He is."

So... when Paul uses the term "faith" (saying in verse 16... "justified through faith"), he is describing both the initial act of trust... and the continuing disposition of trust and obedience. ... This is why faith in Christ and "works of the law" are opposites: one cannot opt for Christ's system *and* Moses' system at the same time because they are mutually exclusive options for salvation.

You simply cannot place your full confidence... your complete trust... in something that you must **DO**... while at the same time... placing your complete trust... in what has already been **DONE**. ... That just isn't possible. ... Having confidence in one... negates the other. ... It is only one... or the other.

In this verse... (which very well may be... the most important verse in the whole letter)... the word *justified* occurs for the first time. ... It is a legal term... borrowed from the law courts and means "to declare righteous." Its opposite is "to condemn."

But what exactly is justification? ... First let me give you a formal definition... and then I would like to show you some exciting things about the very concept of justification.

Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ.

Now here are some things for us to find blessing... as we ponder our justification. #1. Justification is *a one-time... once-and-for-all... act...* and not a process. ... Since we are justified by faith... it is an instant and immediate transaction between the believing sinner and God.... If we were justified by works... then it would have to be a gradual process... because we would have to keep doing them.

#2. No Christian can ever be "more justified" than another Christian. ... In justification, God *declares* the believing sinner righteous; He does not *make* him righteous. (Of course, real justification leads to a changed life, which is what James 2 is all about.) Before the sinner trusts Christ, he stands

GUILTY before God; but the moment he trusts Christ, he is declared NOT GUILTY and he can never be called GUILTY again!

#3. God justifies *sinners*, not "good people." Paul declares that God justifies "the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). The reason most sinners are not justified is because they will not admit they are sinners! And sinners are the only kind of people Jesus Christ can save.

Matthew 9:9-13 (ESV)

As Jesus passed on from there, he saw a man called Matthew sitting at the tax booth, and he said to him, "Follow me." And he rose and followed him. And as Jesus reclined at table in the house, behold, many tax collectors and sinners came and were reclining with Jesus and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw this, they said to his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" But when he heard it, he said, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners."

Justification is based on Christ's sacrificial absorption of our guilt... and we are justified only if we believe in Christ. ... When we evangelize others... whenever and wherever we share the Gospel of Christ... we must first get people to sense their guilt. ... But you know what...? This is increasingly difficult today.

The 1960s generation broke down the importance of a great deal of social laws in the Western world... laws that had enabled easier presentations of the gospel. By that... I mean... most people used to live by some form of a Judeo-Christian ethic. ... They knew whenever they violated this ethic... which... by the way... they considered to be true and divine. ... But today... existentialism... outright apathy and despair... as well as the growth of

pluralism (so many different religions in our country) have made their way into our cultural perceptions... and it has made our Judeo-Christian culture shift... a lot! ... So today... we are facing... by and large... a mass of people who have no sense of moral ultimates. ... It is hard for such people to sense their guilt before God... because they have been taught that being right or wrong... is whatever you want it to be ... "Being good"... today... simply means "feeling good." ... So the entire concept of justification... is not exciting at all... to a generation who doesn't even know that they are sinners... and that God is very angry with them. ... "...*Why should I be thrilled about being declared not guilty...? Was I...? Of what...?*"

The First-Century Jews certainly had a no-nonsense... non-negotiable... brass-tacks... way of knowing right and wrong... It was all clearly spelled out. If you obey the Laws of Moses... you are righteous... if you don't obey the Laws of Moses... you are a sinner.

So... what if you abandon the law altogether... and say that it is no longer needed... (oi vey!) ... What a sinner you must be! And the One Who caused you to abandon it... must be the servant of sin! (Right...? ... Of course right...! ... Well maybe not according to Paul...)

Galatians 2:17

Paul's argument goes like this: "*Peter, you and I did not find salvation through the Law; we found it through faith in Christ. But now, after being saved, you go back into the Law... This declares that you believe Christ alone did not save you... you believe that you still need the Law. ... And if*

you still need the Law... then Christ has promoted sin... by having you turn away from it. ... He made you a sinner!

"Furthermore... you have preached the Gospel of God's grace to Jews and Gentiles... and have told them they are saved by faith... and not by keeping the Law. ... By going back into legalism... you are building up what you tore down! ... This means that you sinned by tearing it down to begin with!"

Galatians 2:18-19

Justification by faith... tore down the Pharisees' "merit system"... with all its laws and good deeds... that attempt to rack up points with God. ... To place a full confidence that you have already been declared righteous... to be justified by faith... and then return to a legal system that is trying to obtain a relationship with God... would be utter nonsense. ... It is going backwards.

Paul felt this so intensely that he expressed it in terms of death, "I died to the law..." There is no more spark... there is no impulse... there is nothing but deadness in me... about returning to my on-going attempts to establish a relationship (that I already have) with God. I had to die to the law... so that I could live for God. ... There is no middle ground. ... I cannot accept salvation by faith... as an accomplished fact... and then work for it... as if I don't have it. All efforts of working for it... must die... otherwise there is no faith!

Galatians 2:20

What Paul describes in this verse... is the common conversion experience of Jews... and former Catholics... or any former religionist. When they turn to Christ... they die to any self-effort... any system of works... anything they must **DO**... in order to be saved.

But it also describes the rest of us as well. Our former self... the person we were before we trusted Christ... with all of our sinful goals... and proud... self-exalting desires... have come to a decisive end. We have been crucified with Christ.

The self-centered personality now becomes the Christ-centered self. Our old life... our old goals and plans... even old relationships... have been nailed to the cross with Christ. ... Now we have a new life... because Christ came in and filled the empty spaces... that all those old pursuits were trying... but could never fill. ... Now Christ lives in us... as Believers... and is the *focus* of our life. ... If this is not true of you... then you are NOT a Christian. Galatians 2:20 gives the standard description of every Christian.

Real life starts... when we are crucified with Christ. Back in the mid-70's... when I was in High School... our youth group went to Hume Lake Christian Camp. The speaker that year was Wayne Swearinger... from Florida. Wayne preached a series of messages on Galatians 2:20... and after that time at camp... everyone came back asking each other... "Hey! Aren't you glad you're dead?" ... Everywhere we went... this became our way of greeting one another... at school in the halls... anywhere in public. Boy did we ever get a lot of strange looks... "Hey! Aren't you glad you're dead...?"

This is indeed a paradox. Real life begins... when we die with Christ.

“It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.” - Isn’t that great...? This is true of all true believers. Christ lives *His life*... through us.

Just before Jesus’ death He said to His disciples...

John 14:19-20 (ESV)

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live. In that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.

Colossians 1:27 (ESV)

To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

It would be a mistake to take Paul's words from our passage this morning... *I no longer live, but Christ lives in me* ... as a proof text for total passivity in the Christian experience. ... Just let go... and let God... The very next phrase underscores the necessity of active faith: *The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God.* ... We do not become just empty pipes that God's power flows through. ... This verse declares... *I no longer live*... as the egocentric person I once was... in obedience to all my selfish passions and desires. ... Now Christ is at the center of my life. Now *I live* in obedience to him... for he *loved me and gave himself for me.*

And did you notice what the Christian’s motive is...? ... We are no longer trying to earn God’s favor... by doing good things. We do good things BECAUSE we already have it!

There is nothing in the law... like the compassion of Christ. The love of God and of Jesus Christ for sinners... which was so great... that it resulted in

Christ giving His life on Calvary to save us... has no equal... ANYWHERE IN HUMAN HISTORY... in compassion. ... His compassion motivates the redeemed... to serve Him... with great dedication and faithfulness. ...The law... or any system of works... will not motivate and inspire like this.

It is as if Paul blurts out in the next verse... there is just NO WAY... that I am going to nullify this fantastic grace of God! ... Peter! And those who have followed you... YOU may nullify the grace of God by continuing your course of action... but I certainly will not! ... I will not act as though Christ died for no purpose. (If salvation is through works... then Christ wasted His time coming to earth... and being crucified.)

Galatians 2:21

The only important question that remains is... what is your response to the truth of the Gospel of Christ...?

Have you been saved by the grace of God...? Please ask yourself... Am I trusting in *myself* for salvation—*my* morality, *my* good works, even *my* religion? If so, then I am not a Christian, for a true Christian is one who has trusted Christ *alone*. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9).

Perhaps you have placed your faith in Christ as your Savior... but have you been trying to mix law and grace...? Law means I must **do** something to please God, while grace means that God has finished the work for me and all I need do is believe on Christ. ... Salvation is not by faith in Christ *plus* something. ... It is by faith in Christ *alone*.

While church membership and religious activities and service are good in their place... as expressions of faith in Christ... they can never be added to faith in Christ in order to secure more favor from God. Your good works will not cause God to favor you more... so that it is more sure He will answer your prayers. Do these good works... because you are already accepted fully by Him. Let His expressed love toward you be your motivation... not what you continue to do for Him.

And then third – as a believer... do you regularly rejoice... and actually celebrate the fact that you are justified by faith in Christ...? ... Have you deeply considered the stark contrast... that you were once a despicable sinner... who God was furious with...? That you were once thoroughly rooted in sin... and deserving of an eternal... painful... experience of the worst imaginable punishment...? ... But that God has now declared you “Not Guilty!”

It is healthy for us here to think about our sinful habits and patterns and to condemn them as disgusting in God's eyes. It is even good for us to pause and contemplate once again the inevitable end of such a life (God's wrath). After pondering such thoughts, we need to think clearly about what Christ has done for us in his sacrifice. We need to contemplate him on the Cross, absorbing our guilt and sin and taking on himself the curse of God so that we might find forgiveness. After deliberating over such things, we can then turn to the joy we find in forgiveness and offer our deepest thanks to God for his grace in our life.