

Galatians 2:11-16

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[0 : 00] Well, it's comforting that I'm not standing here condemned today. I'm just standing here to bring the word of the Lord. Unlike the situation we read of in the passage before us.

! Last week we began to see how Paul addressed the challenge that arose in the gathering of the apostles in Jerusalem.

He had taken Titus with him to Jerusalem and there was this insistence by the other apostles who were Jews that Titus should be circumcised.

And Paul felt that was not right and for him it contradicted the truth of the gospel. So he rose to confront and challenge that because he felt the truth of the gospel was in question and he fought to defend the truth of the gospel.

So last week dealt with circumcision and today, today's passage seems to be dealing with yet another issue but this time the matter of dietary laws.

[1 : 13] Because in the passage before us, some apostles came from Jerusalem. They had been sent by James or they were from the big gathering in Jerusalem.

But before then, Peter who had been with Paul in Antioch and the other Gentiles had been enjoying wonderful fellowship with the Gentiles.

No difference, no discrimination and he would eat with them celebrating his freedom that came to him even in the gospel. Because having been saved, having enjoyed the liberty that the gospel brings, he felt there was no need to be different, to refuse to eat with the Gentiles.

So he ate with them. But when this party came from Jerusalem, he now found himself in a difficult situation.

He decided to keep away from these Gentiles and would no longer participate in the fellowship with them, which I'm sure must have made them to feel one, must have made them to feel welcome, must have made them feel one in the body of Christ.

[2 : 35] If Peter or Kephass, these apostles who had been with the Lord Jesus and Paul would come and sit with them, then truly it meant that the gospel has a way of making people from different nationalities and backgrounds one.

But this time, he kept apart. But not only did that happen, others followed his example. And again, Paul felt he had a responsibility to defend the truth of the gospel.

For him, the challenge was, their action kind of presented the gospel that had come to us, and the gospel of Jesus Christ. And what the gospel stood for, it presented a challenge to the truth of that gospel.

And he felt it needed to be defended. And he stood staunchly to talk against it. And he confronted Kephass to his face.

And did it publicly. And I'm touched that, I'm impressed that he dealt with the matter publicly. I'm sure if I was the one, I would have felt, well, Brother Peter is an important person in the body of Christ.

[3 : 54] This is a man who had had wonderful experiences. There's so much that is said about him in the faith. You don't speak to such a leader publicly.

You call him aside. And in the spirit of Christian love, rebuke him. If he had done that, the Gentiles would still have felt not part of the gospel.

They would have felt cut out. What Paul felt, this gospel should be defended publicly. Why?

Because the gospel is not just a message.

It is the good news that there is a privilege that has come to us in Christ Jesus. And the privilege is that we who are sinners, and all who are sinners, and who are worthy of the condemnation and rejection of God by virtue of sin, could now come and find membership in the body of Christ as a

result of the death and the resurrection of Jesus.

So for Paul, here was an important matter that needed to be defended. God had provided solution for the breaking of every form of wall of division.

[5 : 09] And why would Paul choose to want to raise him on the basis of insisting on Jewish traditions? Because the reason for the separation of Peter or Kephas was the fact that Jews were to observe strict dietary regulations, and they were not to have fellowship with Gentiles, lest their relationship with Gentiles would contaminate their holy appearance or holy nature.

So Paul told him, this is wrong. And he said it in the presence of the Gentiles. This is wrong. And he told him, here is something that you and I have in common. You and I have known this. In verse 15, he explains what is common knowledge to both himself and to Paul, to Peter.

He said, you and I are Jews by birth. We know the law of Jewish lifestyle. We have lived by the Jewish requirements. We have observed all of the requirements.

But, yes, we cannot be compared to, by virtue of Jewish positions, we do not see ourselves as Gentile sinners. Yet, here is something that happens to us. Though you and I were Jews, we came to faith in Christ Jesus.

[6 : 42] And by virtue of our coming to faith in Christ Jesus, something significant has happened to us. We have come to the assurance of salvation.

Not because we have observed the Jewish regulations. Not because we have been wonderful people as Jews. But because we have placed our faith in Jesus and accepted the salvation. The free offer of salvation from him. Therefore, we have assurance of standing before God only in the grace of Jesus. Because you and I know this.

You and I have had experiences of this. Why would Paul be so sure that Peter knew this or Kephas knew this? If you just flip back to Acts chapter 10, you will remember the experience that Peter had. When in a vision, a sheep came from heaven. With all manner of animals. And they were all animals that by Jewish law and regulation, he was not supposed to eat.

[7 : 53] And he was told, rise, kill and eat. And he presented his Jewish regulations. He presented his righteousness by observation of the Jewish regulations.

He said, I have never eaten anything that will defile me. And God told him, why would you, how can you call that which God has cleansed unclean?

Right after that experience, he now saw how the grace of God appeared to the family of Cornelius. A Gentile.

And he saw how God brought Cornelius, an outsider to the Jewish race, into the faith. And he saw how the spirit of God did not discriminate between him, Peter, being a Jew, and the family of Cornelius.

But they were blessed by the spirit of God, the presence of God. Maybe that is why initially he could sit to eat with other Gentiles. And then suddenly, because other fellow disciples from Jerusalem had come, he now turned against this experience he had had.

[9 : 09] He turned against this deep knowledge he had received and acted wrongly. Peter said, this is not right. In doing this, you've betrayed your conscience.

You've betrayed the truth of the gospel that came to you and I. You've betrayed the fellowship that you started to establish, even in the initial relationship you had with these Gentiles.

And we all do the same. In various ways we do the same. When in our churches we think we are more Christian than others because of race, we are behaving just like Peter behaved in his relationship with these Gentiles.

When we would refuse to see and have fellowship with fellow believers, creatures, children of God created in his image and likeness.

But if we would differ on the basis of race, on the basis of our educational standing, on the basis of something that is not a criteria for entering into the relationship with God, we behave just like Peter.

[10 : 33] And I hear the voice of the Lord speaking strongly through Paul that this does not present the truth of the gospel. The truth of the gospel is less.

The salvation of God has come to all, irrespective of color, skin, knowledge, wealth, status also. Salvation has come to all who would choose to place their faith in Jesus Christ.

So yes, though they had a joint theology and joint understanding, Peter betrayed it. And we have a responsibility to draw others into this faith.

When I first arrived in this country, I had some wonderful experiences in the people, in some of the churches I went to, but the truth also is that in some of the churches I visited, I left wondering whether I had been in a church that truly believed in the name of Jesus.

Because after service, they all had fellowship with each other, would greet each other and say hello to each other. But this Nigerian felt out of place.

[11:48] No one would say hello to me. And I wondered whether I was really a child of God and was among the children of God. Yet, there are other churches that when I went to, oh, they so embraced me.

And I felt at home. And that is exactly the experience I have had in this lunchtime talk. This is why I keep coming again and again and again. Because here I have a sense that I'm among children of God.

I'm among family. I'm among brethren. And this is what Paul fought for. This is what the truth of the gospel makes clear. If our faith in Christ will cause division when we go out, if our relationship with others outside will make them feel condemned, rejected, despised, because we are holier people, we are so righteous that we are doing them, those who do not believe in Christ, a favor in inviting them, then we are not representing the gospel correctly.

And that is why Paul went on in verse 20 to say, look, here is a truth.

We have been crucified with Christ. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ that lives in me.

[13:17] And in that statement, Paul was acknowledging that the gruesome nature of the death of Christ was a result of who I am and who I had become.

And that is what I was deserving. But when Christ died that horrifying, that gruesome death, he died in my place.

So in him I died. I died to a desire to prove my standing with God by my works. I died because I realized that it is only in Christ that I am accepted and I can please God, not by any works of righteousness.

It's not my wonderful prayer life that qualifies me for a right relationship with God. It's not good as prayer is. It's not my knowledge of Bible and my ability to recite all of it that qualifies me for a right standing with God.

Good as that is, it's not even the good works I do to prove that I am a wonderful Christian that qualifies me to enter into right standing with God.

[14:28] It is only faith in the fact that what you and I have not been able to do would for all of eternity not be able to do to merit eternity with God.

Christ did it on our behalf. And by virtue of our placing faith in Him we are accepted, we stand right with God, we stand justified with God, we stand beyond condemnation, beyond rejection with God. That is what has happened also. Though I continue to live, according to Paul, he says, though I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I that lives, but Christ who lives in me.

My responsibility is to allow Christ to live in and through me. So I become merely a channel through which the life of God will be expressed in and through me in my relationship with people.

Electricity passes through the cables, but the cables never take credit for the power that passes through them. Water flows through the pipes to come to my house.

[15:38] I benefit from the water, I use the water, but the pipes never take credit for it. Why would we then take credit for the life of God that should be flowing in and through us to bring others to the knowledge of God and the love of God in Christ Jesus?

So Paul says, when you, Peter, when you try to rebuild those things that you have been convinced were wrong, when you try to bring back the lifestyle you have been convinced was wrong, when you try to live by the regulations, by the laws, in the hope that observing them is what qualifies you to be a proper Jew, then you are rebuilding those things that you say Christ has destroyed in you. So when we show difference, when we live with a sense of superiority over others, when we treat others as though they are not good enough, they are not as good as we are to come to the Lord, we are now destroying what Jesus has done for us.

We are saying, yes, Jesus, granted you died for me, you cleansed my sin, but here is some good that I have done that qualifies to be accepted. No, it's not that we will not do good works, but whatever good works we do should be Christ leading us.

We will walk in grateful response to who we have been made and what God has done in us. not that our good works will be a way of earning God's merit of commendation.

[17 : 31] Paul tells us, when we begin to trust in the same works that we looked up to God to deal with so that we will be accepted, then we are nullifying the grace of God.

As we go out to relate with people and they meet with us and we try to evangelize, which is what I encounter every day, what do we present to them?

What do we, how do we come up to those that we seek to share the gospel of Jesus with? Do they meet very wonderful, holy people that are so far that they cannot begin to aspire to reach up to by virtue of their good works?

The only things we have to present, what do we present to cause us to be accepted? Our wonderful works? Or do we present the truth that we are also sinners that have been saved by God?

We are sinners being saved by the cleansing of the word of God that comes to us constantly and we are people that will be saved from the very presence of sin itself when we finally stand in the presence of God?

[18 : 55] What do we make them feel very bad? In 1998, I remember, back in Nigeria, when we were trying to plant a church in a very remote part of Abuja.

Abuja is the capital city of Nigeria. It's a new capital that was formed. So there are loads of villages that were unreached. We had been sending women who had gone there as part of women fellowship, youth had gone there, but they had not been successful.

On this particular day, I went along with them and they were happy. Their pastor, a leader in the church, had come along with them and so maybe I would do something unique that would make the people accept the gospel.

And on that day, the people decided they are tired of these people that have been coming to try to make them change their way of life. They would do something so despicable to keep us away.

And we went to preach and they brought food. And the manner from the dish to the place we start to eat to the appearance of the people, it will take exceptional grace for you to sit to eat with them.

[20 : 15] And we start to eat. And the leader of the group did something that is so terrible I wouldn't want to tell you so that you will be able to eat your next meals.

And when he had finished, he came and I looked at his hand and his hand was in bad need of water.

But he looked at me and came and dipped his hand right in front of where I was sitting and ate and everybody waited to see what I would do.

I was struggling between vomiting and getting up of that place. But I quietly prayed and asked God to help me. And I ate from the same spot that he ate.

And that moment was when he decided to give his life to Christ. Two years later, he was preaching in the community where we had gone to plant the church.

[21 : 21] and he said the one thing that made him give his life to Christ was the fact that they were filthy yet we did not reject to eat with them.

They had done they were living in squalor in great filth but it did not turn us away. They now believed that we had genuine love for them.

but I told him we had received greater love from the Lord Jesus. Because you see everyone who has sinned is deserving of the judgment of God.

But God chose to send Jesus who died so that we who are deserving of condemnation would find life eternal with him.

all around us are people that are desperately in need of a true manifestation of the love of God. All around us are people who are interested in meeting Christians who would not present how wonderful they are but would present the wonderful loving God they are in relationship with.

[22 : 40] so that when they see that lifestyle they will be drawn into the relationship with the Lord Jesus that will transform them and they will stand because of the love of God.

Do we go out being such people or do we go out lifting up our noses looking down on people despising them because they have not entered into the relationship you and I have in Christ Jesus.

God expects that because we have received of his salvation freely we have experienced his love and we have been drawn into a loving relationship with him so freely we will be extension of his hands in reaching out to people I mean we would be available to be channels through whom he would pass to touch others.

Let them see our lifestyle let them see our submission to God let them see how desperately we love God and are appreciative of the message we have received that they can be attracted and welcome into this wonderful fellowship that you and I have.

And I assure you in case you are here and you are thinking about what the Christian faith is all about it is entering into a wonderful loving relationship with Jesus and he will not condemn you.

[24 : 20] Most of us humans are a poor reflection of what the true gospel ought to be but I tell you if you would just give in to the Lord Jesus you would know love that is beyond understanding.

Let's pray.