

Galatians 2:11-21

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[0 : 00] So there is a new disease that has been diagnosed in North America and Europe and it is called! Affluenza. It is also called sudden well syndrome. Its symptoms include more money than you! know what to do with, the inability to delay gratification, a false sense of entitlement, the loss of future motivation, secret feelings of guilt, difficulty in making friends and underneath it all, say the psychiatrist, is a profound identity crisis. It used to be that our identity came to us from our history and from our family and from our community and our commitment from those whom we love. But in a market economy we are now defined by a kind of series of consumer choices that we can make. Freedom of choice is a big thing, isn't it? It was wanted as the kind of great thing at the end of the 20th century, in some ways more so now, you can choose what you want to be. Choose what gender you are. Choose what sexuality you are. But although it has been vaunted as a great thing, it really has become a kind of tyranny of defining yourself. So these celebrities spend all their time defining themselves again and again and again. I read recently there is a guy called Karl Lagerfelder who recently unloaded \$30 million of his furniture collection. What have you got \$30 million worth of furniture for? But he got rid of it in an attempt to redefine himself. The reason I tell you that is because one of the reasons that we meet here week by week to worship God is because we desperately need to be reminded who we are. And that who we are comes not from our financial status. Who you are does not come from whether you are married or not. Who you are does not come from whether you own a property or you just rent it. It does not come from your education. Your identity does not come from your performance or from your success or from your failures, thank goodness. But we remind ourselves week by week that our lives are determined by what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. And we as a congregation together and individually are defined not by fashion or furniture or features but we are defined by the crucifixion of the Son of God for us. And we read in this section in verse 20 this towering statement don't we? Can you see it? 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.

What this passage says to us and what we have learnt over these past eight weeks I hope is that the crucifixion is not just an event that took place outside a city wall 2,000 years ago.

But it is not just a great exchange where God takes our sin and places it on Jesus and we take Jesus' righteousness and it is given to us although the cross wonderfully is that.

But the cross is a place where we are personally irrevocably changed forever. That we ourselves are crucified with Christ so that we now can live to God. That is who we are.

[3 : 53] And I think it is amazing to see how the apostle brings that mighty reality home in verses 11 to 21. The apostle Paul presents us with a sharp contrast in how to live.

And it is a contrast that all of us struggle with. It is a contrast that each one of us struggle with. Whether we live out of fear, that is the first thing, or whether we live out of love.

And that goes to understand, really, right to the heart of how we understand who we are. So verses 11 to 14, firstly, we are not who we are because of fear.

We are not who we are because of fear. Now Cephas, verse 11, this is another name for Peter. And the apostle Peter was the most prominent of the early apostles.

In the church, he was a man who had walked with Jesus Christ. And he had been commissioned to be an apostle after he denied Peter before the young maid.

[4 : 56] And both he and the apostle Paul are the honoured leaders of the early church. Both are committed to the same gospel. But we read this remarkable story of how the great leader let the side down.

When it came to the truth. Not because he changed his convictions. Not because the apostle Peter suddenly realised that he believed a different gospel. But because of his fear of a powerful group and what they would think of him.

And so he played the hypocrite. And if you look at verse 11, it is a shocking verse. Paul reports a dramatic conflict between him and the apostle Peter.

It took place in Antioch. Which is the first place where Gentiles were converted in great numbers. And the first place where people were called Christians. Peter himself has gone back to Jerusalem. And he's explained that now the gospel has gone beyond the borders of the Jewish faith. And the Christian gospel is now welcoming Gentile Christians. And the Jewish church in Jerusalem, well most of them agreed.

[6 : 03] And so they sent him back to Antioch with Barnabas. And Barnabas went. And when he saw the size of the work he took Paul with him. And we read at the end of Acts, for a whole year Paul and Barnabas met with the church.

And they taught a large company of people in Antioch. For the first time people were called Christians. So when Peter comes up a few months later to Antioch.

He joins in table fellowship with the Gentiles. He eats with them. He participates with them. He is with them as a demonstration of the gospel.

It's a demonstration that God accepts all, us all, by faith in Jesus Christ. He does not insist that they be circumcised. He does not insist that they abide by the old food laws.

But an influential group from the head office come to the church. A Jewish Christian delegation from Jerusalem are sent by presbytery.

[7 : 07] And they bring with them a two-tier faith system. They say it's one thing to have faith in Jesus Christ. But if you really want salvation you've got to abide by the law.

You have got to be circumcised. And it's fascinating to see their effect on Peter. Look at verse 12. The last sentence. When they came.

He drew back. And he separated himself. Fearing the circumcision party. When they came. Peter drew back and separated himself.

Why? Because he feared the circumcision party. This isn't a decision made in deep conviction. It's a decision based on fear. On what an important group of people will say of him.

And think of him. He doesn't get up and say. Listen I was wrong about the gospel. The death of Jesus is not enough for your salvation. I got it wrong. You're going to have to subscribe to the Jewish law.

[8 : 13] You're going to have to get circumcised. No. Under pressure from influential people. Peter changes. Quietly and gradually. And unobtrusively.

He withdraws. And I think. That this has always been the pressure on God's people. And I think that is the pressure on us.

The pressure on us is not in the first instance. To deny the gospel. To deny the gospel. The pressure I think in the first instance. Is not to practice it. And you and I.

Have got people of influence in our lives. Who we would get along with a lot better. If we were just able to compromise a little. They don't mind. They don't mind. What we believe.

As long as our behavior. Doesn't make them feel uncomfortable. And when a Christian leader falls into this trap. And he fails to practice the gospel. It has a knock on.

[9 : 13] A flow on effect. Can you see verse 30. And the rest of the Jews. Acted hypocritically along with him. So that even Barnabas.

That great hero of the faith. Was led astray by their hypocrisy. There is nothing. In the Christian church. More contagious than hypocrisy. We have.

Every single one of us. It doesn't matter. Your personality. Really. We have a. Contagious disease. A natural desire. To please others. Some really more so than others.

And when a powerful pressure group. Comes from head office. Or comes from an influential place. It is very difficult. To have the courage of your convictions. It's what pressure groups are.

Are thought groups. They want to obscure. The truth of the gospel. By applying the pressure of approval. And Peter would never have. Separated himself from the Gentiles.

[10 : 14] If he wasn't looking over his shoulder. If he wasn't being driven. At this time. By the need for approval. By fear of what they thought of him. It's not by conviction.

Or obedience. Or love for God. And the apostle Paul. Seems to damage. It's good in the church. And the gospel. And the gospel. And he takes this unprecedented step. In front of them all. He rebukes Peter publicly. Look at verse 14. Verse 14. When I saw. That their conduct. That their conduct. Was not in step. With the truth of the gospel.

I said. To Cephas. In front. Well. Before them all. If you are a Jew. If you. Though a Jew. Live like a Gentile.

And not like a Jew. How can you force the Gentiles. To live like Jews. Incredibly brave. Incredibly brave. You see. There were many good reasons. For Paul. Not to raise this in public.

[11:10] With Peter. Peter. It's astounding. The profile he would have had. Wouldn't he? He's a very important. And a very impressive apostle. He is surrounded by the boys.

From head office. And have you noticed. As you read the epistles of Paul. How he dislikes conflict. That if you read through the epistles. You'll see how many times. He makes ground. And he compromises around the edges. How many times. He calls people to unity. To maintain the unity. Of the spirit. And the bond of peace. And it would have been much easier.

Not to publicly rebuke Peter. It would have been easier. For him to listen to those. Who were saying. Don't rock the boat Paul. Just cooperate. It doesn't matter. It would have been much easier. To listen to the modern theologians. Who would have said. And it's good for us. To have different gospels. To have different gospels. To have different gospels. That we're tolerant. And we're diverse.

[12:06] Isn't that wonderful? As an organization. But what the apostle Paul sees. Is when the truth of the gospel. Is at stake. Diversity is disobedience. When the truth of the gospel.

Is at stake. Diversity is disobedience. And it is supremely important. To make a stand. Just cast your eyes. Back to chapter one. And there. In chapter one.

In verses eight and nine. You see how important. The apostle Paul thinks this is. Verse eight. But even if we. It's one of the apostolic band. Or an angel from heaven. Should preach to you. A gospel contrary. To the one we preach to you. Let him be accursed. As we've said before. So I now say again. If anyone is preaching to you. A gospel contrary. To the one you received. The apostolic gospel.

Let him be accursed. Paul is saying to us. There's such a thing as truth. And all the pressure. And all the negotiations. And all the choices in the world. Don't change the basic nature. Of the gospel.

[13:02] And we're not told. Are we. About the immediate. Reaction of. Peter. Or not. But years later. Just before the apostle Peter died.

He writes in his second letter. And he refers to Paul. And he does not just refer to him. As Paul. He doesn't refer to him. As the apostle Paul. He doesn't refer to him.

As our brother Paul. But with obvious. And with genuine affection. Peter calls him. Our beloved brother. Paul. Because Peter realizes. By the time you get to one and two.

Peter. That his actions. Were in direct contradiction. With the gospel. That he'd acted. Out of fear. Of others. Of others. But as followers of Jesus Christ.

We are not who we are. Because of fear. So who are we? That moves us to the second side. Of the contrast. We are who we are. Verses 11 and 12.

[14:00] Because of love. Because of love. And in these verses. The apostle opens for us. The truth of the gospel. If you cast your eyes down. You can see the heart of the gospel.

Is this idea of justification. Verse 16. And yet we know. That a person. Is not justified. Is not declared. To be right. With God. 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. If you didn't get it. If you didn't get it. If you didn't get it. Because by works of the law. No one will be justified. You see.

Justification. By faith. Is what makes. All. Other approval. And disapproval. Utterly irrelevant. We are constantly trying.

[15:01] To justify ourselves. Aren't we? To one another. To one another. We look over our shoulder. We are worried. What others think of us. But justification. By faith.

Is about what God thinks. Is. It is in fact. That in the death. Of Jesus Christ. On the cross. The great. Verdict of God.

On the last day. Has been brought into the now. And has been declared. That's what justification is. The great. Verdict of God. On the day of judgment.

Has been brought into the now. So we can know now. We are justified by faith. When Jesus comes again. To judge the living. The dead. Those who have turned.

From their sin. And placed their trust. In Jesus Christ. Will be. Are. Justified. And the miracle of justification. Is that we know about it now. And what that means.

[15:59] Is that our fundamental. Understanding of ourselves. Does not come. From approval. Or disapproval. Of any other person. No matter how important. Or beautiful.

Or theologically influential. But it means. That our understanding. Of ourselves. Must come. From God himself. And when we act.

Out of fear. As the apostle Peter did. We are trying to build. Our own justification. To build our own. Little tower. Of morality. Or achievement. But justification.

By faith. Is not a kind of. Renovation. Redecoration. It is being made. With God. Through the death. Of Jesus Christ. And that is why.

Paul says. It does not come. By works. And it does not come. By self-help. It does not come. Through acceptance. By other people. It comes. By the radical.

[16:56] Personal acceptance. Won for us. Through the death. Of Jesus on the cross. For all that stood. Between me and God. All my guilt.

The curse. That I rightly deserve. Because I have broken. God's good law. Jesus Christ. Has become. That curse. And he has taken it. From me.

And that is why. Paul speaks. For every single. When he says. In verse 20. I am crucified. With Christ. It is no longer.

I who live. But Christ. Who lives. Who lives. In me. Do you find. That astonishing. Things say. That for the person.

Who is trusted. The death. Does not have. A vague effect. On me. But when. I place. My faith. In Jesus Christ. I die.

[17:51] In his death. I am. Co. Crucified. With him. So the justification. It is not. It is not. Just a kind of.

Legal fiction. That is out there. It is a living. Union. With the person. Of the Lord. Jesus Christ. That it changes me. At my. Deepest core.

Of who I am. It means. That my life. Is not. Centered. And focused. And lived out. Of me. But out of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ. And I think. The idea. Crucified. With Jesus Christ. Alarming. And it is. Intimidating. And it is.

It is. A perfect description. Of what it means. To be a Christian. It means. The absolute. End. To one. Sort of life. That life.

[18:47] Where. Self. Is. Admired. And indulged. That life. Where I live. Based on. Fear. Of approval.

Or disapproval. It is over. And it means. The beginning. Of a new life. A new life. A living. Sacrifice. A life. Lived.

In the light. Of justification. A life. Of real. Actual. Communion. And friendship. With the Lord Jesus. Where my life. Is not determined. By my self effort.

Whether I have. A good day. Or a bad day. A life. Where I know. That I am very sinful. But I know. Looks on me. As righteous. And that is why.

He says. It is no longer. I who live. But Christ. Who lives. In me. It's not. That our personalities. Don't cease. To exist. Is it?

[19:43] But. That our lives. Are animated. By communion. With Christ. Christ. And every. Christian. When they understand. Looks at themselves. In amazement.

Sometimes. And says. That wasn't me. That was Christ. In me. And where does this power. Come from? Where does this power.

Where does this transformation. Come from? It comes from. Faith. Verse 20. In the son of God. Who loved me. And gave himself for me.

And that is who we are. Says the apostle Paul. We are defined by this. The son of God. Loved me. And gave himself.

For me. The core of who I am. Is in the cross of Jesus Christ. Because it is in the cross. That I find freedom.

[20 : 38] I find freedom. From trying to justify myself. Before God. I can find freedom. To accept the fact. That I am a very sinful person. But I don't need to blame God.

I don't need to blame my parents. Or my children. Or my society. Or my friends. Fundamentally. It is freedom. It is freedom. From being defined. By anything. That is.

Economic. Or social. Or political reality. Or whether I am married. Or not. It is freedom. To be defined. By that one act. Of love. On the cross.

That the God man. Poured out his life. For us. That I might be crucified. With him. And justified. By him. And that I might now. Live for God.

It is a very very important passage. For us. Because I think. I suspect. That as a group of Christians. We find it.

[21 : 36] Easier to be. Peter. Rather than Paul. That although we have come to believe. In the Lord Jesus Christ. We are not free. And we are very.

Much in bondage. And we have allowed. And continue to allow the world. To define us. And to tell us. What to think. How to live.

And to tell us. How to behave. Rather than the cross. And our hopes. And our dreams. And our plans. And our decisions. For us. And for our children. Are often more shaped.

By the culture. Than they are by the cross. And so it is a glorious truth. Isn't it tonight. That those of us. Who have faith. In the Lord Jesus. We are not. Who we are.

Because of fear. We are who we are. Because of love. And not just. Any love. But the love of God. Who gave himself.

[22 : 32] For us. That he might rescue us. From this world. And he might enable us. To serve him. And to serve. One another. For the glory of God. That is who we are.

That is who we are. I have been crucified. With Christ. It is no longer I. But Christ. Who lives in me. For 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. Let's pray.