

**June 16, 2013**  
**Pentecost**

*“Stay on Track with Christ Alone”*

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**GALATIANS 2:11-21**

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**W**hen Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.<sup>12</sup> For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. <sup>14</sup> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? <sup>15</sup> "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles <sup>16</sup> know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. <sup>17</sup> "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup> If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. <sup>19</sup> "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup> I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup> I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

How good is your balance? When we were children we tried to walk on the rail of the train tracks that ran next to our farm. It was a challenge to see who could walk the farthest on the track without falling. The older you get the harder it is to keep your balance.

So it is with the Christian church living in the last days of its history here on this earth. There will be a huge challenge to stay on track with the clear message that we are saved by Christ alone without any works or efforts on our part. Satan will even masquerade like an angel of light to derail us into thinking there is something we have to contribute to what Jesus has done for us to be a true believer.

How shocked Paul was to hear that the dear Christians in the provinces of Galatia were being taught that you had to add laws of the Old Testament to what Christ had done to be a first class believer. These teachers were so persuasive that they even influenced the great apostle Peter and the great missionary Barnabas to back off from boldly proclaiming salvation in Christ alone. Satan knows he only has a little time before the end comes. We need these words before us this morning to encourage us to stay on track with Christ alone.

**Derailed without Christ alone**

What a mess it is if a train runs off the track and gets derailed. I worked on the railroad for two summers while going through school. I saw a train wreck where almost fifty cars ran off the track and piled up against each other. Paul saw a spiritual train wreck among the Galatians. He begins his letter to these people with these words, "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you by the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel." How could these people think they had to add something to God's grace to make it more complete? Even Peter, the great pillar of the church, was influenced by these false teachers.

"When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong." The great Apostle Paul stood up to the great Apostle Peter. He got in his face and told him publicly before others that he was in the wrong because he backed off from eating meals with Gentile Christians when Jewish Christians came from Jerusalem. "Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group."

Peter enjoyed eating with his brothers and sisters in Christ who were Gentiles. The Lord had given him a vision of a large sheet coming down from heaven filled with unclean animals. In that vision the Lord told him to eat the flesh of these animals. The Lord also told him to go to the home of a Gentile named Cornelius. Because Christ had come it was no longer necessary to stay away from certain foods, celebrate certain festivals and even worship on the seventh day. When Peter visited the Christians in Antioch he gladly ate with Gentiles. Ham sandwich? No problem. BLT (Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato)? No problem. Double-Double from In-Out-Burger? No problem.

Ah, but how things changed when Peter heard that certain Jewish Christians were also coming to visit from Jerusalem. He stopped eating with Gentiles because he was afraid of these people. They were saying a true believer in Jesus would desire to be circumcised and refrain from eating certain foods and follow some of the Old Testament laws. Peter was certainly not saying you had to add Old Testament laws to what Christ had done to be a true Christian. However, his actions had a huge impact on Gentile believers. Actions often speak louder than words. Can't you hear the Gentile believers raising these questions? "Maybe we aren't first class Christians. Maybe there are laws we still need to keep to one in Christ." Paul writes, "The other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray."

We had a woman once attend this congregation who wore a long dress with long sleeves. She had come from a group of Christians who implied that you had to wear these clothes or you were not a true believer. Anna started wearing dresses with short sleeves. Her friend from her former church told her, "Anna, you are going down for wearing dresses with short sleeves." When I worshipped as a child the men (most dairy farmers) would wear suits and white shirts and ties when they came to worship. The women wore dresses and hats. A woman in the late 1950's and even early 60's would not even think of wearing pants to church. That was the custom of the times. Today we see people come to church dressed with shirt and tie, and others come more casually dressed. It would be a sad day in the church if some said the only true truly sanctified Christians are the ones who dress casually, or only the truly sanctified are the ones that dress formally.

We wish that the temptation to add something to what Christ has done were as simple as making laws on what clothes to wear to church on Sunday morning. Satan is so adept at developing strategies to get people off track when it comes to representing the gospel clearly. Satan had successfully led Peter to boldly deny Jesus the night before he died. Satan also successfully led Peter to subtly deny Jesus by withdrawing from eating with Gentiles in the presence of Jewish believers who were not teaching correctly.

Permit a story to illustrate how subtly Satan can lead people who say they are Christians to add to what Christ has done. There was once a fellow by the name of "Ben Trying" who said he believed in God, yet he lived a wild life and never went to church much. He became sick and was only given a few months to live. As his end drew near his four sisters came periodically to visit him, hoping they could speak to him about Jesus before he died. One sister said to him, "Ben, I know you don't have much longer to live. Why don't you try to be more like Jesus? Maybe God will take you to heaven when you die." Ben said to her rather sadly, "I've been trying!" Another sister came to visit. She said, "Ben, I know you don't have much longer to live. Why don't you try to pray to God more? Maybe he will hear your prayers and bless you." Ben looked at her sadly and said, "I've been trying!" Another sister came and said, "Ben you don't have much longer to live. Jesus died for all your sins. Why don't you just accept him into your heart and you will be saved?" Ben said to her with sadness in his voice, "I've been trying."

Finally his youngest sister came to him and said. "Ben, I love you and I know you don't have much longer to live. Both of us have something in common that we have shared all of our lives. We have sinned and fallen short of God's glory. Remember how we used to fight as kids. Remember when we didn't obey Mom and Dad, and even made Mom cry one day. I think of all the evil thoughts in my heart and I know that you often think of things you have said and done when you aren't feeling well. There is no way God could ever accept us as we are, that is why he gave us his Son Jesus. Ben, Jesus took everything we did wrong, including the sins of the world upon himself. His blood shed for us makes the payment to God we could never give. He rose from the dead and it is all real for both of us. Then she shared the words of the Bible that can be shared in every situation with people who are without Christ. "God so loved the world....." Ben, looked up at his sister. He looked at her and smiled. Ben said... nothing. You see at that moment in his life, Ben Trying stopped trying. The Lord opened his heart to believe with the unconditional message of the gospel, Christ alone not Christ plus works.

### **On track with Christ alone**

Ah, how beautifully the Apostle Paul speaks the truth of the gospel here in these verses and throughout the book of Galatians. "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' know that a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified." The Jews who became Christians knew that they were not justified or declared righteous before God by keeping laws of the Old Testament whether it was obeying the Ten Commandments or not eating certain foods such as pork. They put their faith in Christ to be justified or declared righteous before God just as the Gentile sinners had also come to believe in Christ.

It says here that "by observing the law no one will be justified." You can see the deep

seated evil in the human heart by observing the little children, or think back to your own childhood. You mother or father reprimands you for hitting a brother or sister. You justify your actions by saying, "He hit me first." The husband justifies being mean to his wife because she was mean to him first. A world full of human beings sincerely believe they can justify themselves before a holy and perfect God by pointing out that they are doing a better job of living their life than other people they know. Every religion in the world apart from the Christian faith says that you can justify yourself to whatever God you believe in by how you live your life. The words of the Bible are so simple and so clear. "By observing the law no one will be justified." These words also apply to those who teach you are partially saved by what God does for you in Christ and partially saved by what you do.

Paul writes, "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me." The precious faith given to you by the Holy Spirit connects you to Jesus death on the cross. In your baptism you died with Jesus, you were buried with Jesus, and rose from the dead with Jesus. Colossians 3 says, "Since then you have been raised with Christ." Precious God given faith and your baptism allow you to say with Paul this morning, "I have been crucified with Christ." Christ lives in you and he keeps you on track trusting in him alone for your salvation. He leads you each day to live your life out of love for all that he has done for you. The life we live this week comes from the faith in the Son of God of loved us and gave his life for us. "In Christ alone, My hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song." Amen.