



## **Galatians 2:11-14**

### **Free Grace, Freeing Grace**

**10/2/2022**

We are going to Galatians 2 today. We are going to look at verses 1-14.

The Gospel that Christians believe is the message that we can't work our way to God, so He came to us. In Jesus Christ, who is true God and true man, God lived among us. He lived a perfect life, taught the perfect way, and then went to the cross. There, he was crucified for our sins - He became our substitute - taking the hellish punishment that we deserve, and offering that to us for free.

We had already fallen too badly to work our way to God, so He came and gave that to us as a gift. And we receive it by grace, which means it is all a gift, through faith, which means we trust in Him, not that we work our way to Him. If we turn to Him in belief in what He has done, He forgives us.

And this is great news because it means we can have the relationship with God we were made for, and we can have it for free. There's nothing we do to get it, nothing we add to it - it is all grace, all a gift.

And this was the good news that the apostle Paul was traveling the world spreading. He had gone to the city of Antioch in Galatia (modern day Turkey), and there he ministered to a group of Christians that was, for the first time, mostly Gentile. Jews and Gentiles converted to Jesus there, but this wasn't in Jewish territory, it was mostly Gentile.

And as they were converting to Jesus, Paul made clear that they didn't need to convert to the Jewish culture or the Jewish ceremonial law. All of the ceremonies, like circumcision, were symbols of what Jesus would do for us, and now that Jesus had done it for them, they didn't need the symbols anymore. Which was a freeing message.

But there was a conflict from a group of people called the Judaizers. These people were very closely connected to the Pharisees during Jesus's ministry. (Acts 15:5 says that the Judaizers were from the "party of the Pharisees.") Some Pharisees had accepted the message of Jesus, but remained convinced that to enter God's kingdom, you must also become Jewish: you must follow the ceremonies, the diet code, and circumcision.

And they were making major waves and a major movement, the message of the Judaizers was becoming mainstream.

And this message created not just an unclear Gospel, but an alternative Gospel, which really wasn't another one. It wasn't a Gospel that could save. The Gospel Paul preached and the apostles preached said you need Jesus plus nothing else to become a Christian, the false Gospel of the Judaizers said you need Jesus plus your own observances. They were two very different recipes for salvation.

And now, for 14 years Paul has been preaching this message of free grace in Christ, but he hears that up in Jerusalem, the Jewish headquarters of the church, more and more are saying you must add circumcision.

So Paul makes a trip to Jerusalem. He brings his ministry partner, Barnabas, and a Gentile convert to the faith named Titus with him. He doesn't want to be on a different page than the leaders in the Jewish church up there, He wants to make sure the same Gospel is being proclaimed to everyone, so he goes up for a private meeting with the church leaders in Jerusalem, Peter, James, and John.

**Galatians 2:1-3 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 2 I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. 3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.**

So Paul goes up for some private conversations with church leaders, and the result of those conversations was that they all agreed there's no reason to circumcise Titus, because you don't need to follow the Jewish ceremonies to be a full Christian.

But that required a courageous stand:

**Galatians 2:4-5 4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— 5 to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.**

There was conflict there - these Judaizers were all around, trying to bring the whole world back under the bondage of the ceremonial law.

Sometimes we think, "There's conflict in a church, so it must not be healthy, it must not be on God's mission, it must be a toxic environment." And certainly churches embroiled in conflict can feel toxic, and can be toxic if they're fighting the wrong battles the wrong ways. But conflict has always come with church life, and there are the right things to argue about.

And Paul was willing to pick this fight for one big reason: to preserve the truth of the Gospel.

Something big was at stake here:

How does a person get their sins forgiven? (Jesus, or Jesus plus our works?)

How are we redeemed? (Jesus, or Jesus plus our works?)

Are there two Gospels, or one?

Should there be a separation between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians?

Is there one Lord, but two Lord's tables? Separate fellowship?

Do Christians need to keep the Jewish ceremonial law?

(Do we have to observe Kosher laws? Paul never says this is his motivation, but another big thing at stake here is bacon. Are we free to enjoy bacon? Paul says, 'they're trying to take away Bacon, I gotta get to Jerusalem and stop this.')

In seriousness, the Gospel message, the message that saves and unifies, was worth fighting for. It was too good to lose, and having it absorbed into yet another religious system that puts you on a treadmill of maybe being obedient enough to please God would have been too much of a loss to bear.

Grace is far too good to lose.

But when good church people hear that nothing we do makes us OK, no obedience makes God owe us anything, and that we are utterly dependent on a free God who gives grace where He wills, we can get mad. Because we lose our control. We lose our ability to tell God that He is obligated to do something for us because of our obedience.

And this is such a danger for us, for the church people. We can think that all of our singing and tithing and serving and working and opening our homes and studying our bibles and praying and mercy work and evangelism can earn us God's approval.

And we can think that God is in our debt because we are so good. But if God owes us something, it isn't grace at all, it's a debt. And God is not anyone's debtor.

In fact, when we do good to get God to do something, it is a subtle attempt to get God in our service. To switch places with God. To become the one who can call the shots, while God is the one who does our bidding.

We never think this through all the way, but often we are being good because we want to be God. We want to be in control of God.

But Christians are people who are always utterly dependent upon God's grace.

Good clean people can hate God's grace, because they don't want to acknowledge that what they need from God is something they don't deserve, something they could never earn, and that whether or not they get that blessing is completely out of their control.

Good clean people often avoid repenting and trusting in The Savior because they think they are already ok because of their moralism and religion.

They miss what grace really is. And Paul won't allow it.

He won't allow us to go through life thinking we deserve God's grace, while at the same time somehow thinking we are the ones who don't really need it.

He won't allow us to look at other people as the ones who really need God's grace, but at the same time don't deserve it like I do.

He won't allow us to go through life deluded into thinking that I'm so awesome that God owes me one.

And He is willing to lose a lot of friends and garner a lot of enemies to make sure we know what grace really is.

Because people who think they're OK on their own miss God's grace altogether. But the ones who recognize that they are totally unworthy of it are the only ones who can receive it.

**Galatians 2:6-10** **6 And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. 7 On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised 8 (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 9 and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.**

So the end result of the Jerusalem meeting is that the apostles, James, John, and Cephas (which is the Aramaic name for Peter), all approved of the Gospel Paul was preaching, they added nothing to it, they welcomed him and Titus, and said we all believe the same thing, we're all one.

And they said, "Just remember the poor." So you had a unified church, serving the global community, particularly in these hard famine times. So the church was unified by the Gospel and doing good together.

Grace had unified JEw and Gentile (two groups that could never be united before.) Grace had compelled them onto a common mission. Grace had motivated all of them to care for those in poverty. Grace made strangers family. It was a big win - and that is what the church is supposed to be.

So Paul and the crew go back to Antioch. And then Peter came down to visit, and it was clear this battle wasn't over:

**Galatians 2:11-14** **"But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For before certain men came from James, he was**

eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. **13 And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?”**

So Peter comes to the church where Paul is based in Antioch, and at first everything is fine. There's one Lord, one Gospel, one table. Everybody is unified.

And you'd expect this from Peter, because God specifically revealed to him that it was supposed to be this way:

**Acts 10:10-15 “And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11 and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12 In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13 And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14 But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” 15 And the voice came to him again a second time, m“What God has made clean, do not call common.”**

Peter had this vision, and the point of it was not just the bacon, but that Jews and Gentiles in Christ are now declared clean. You don't have to become Jewish first. Peter knew this, Peter believed this, and in the text here it never says he ceased to believe this.

But then some other visitors came “from James.” They claimed to be the followers of James, on James' mission, and they were bringing that same old message: “you must be circumcised to be saved.”<sup>1</sup>

And Peter didn't sign off on what they were saying, but he started living like what they were saying was true. He stopped eating with Gentiles - he wanted to keep these influential people happy. He drew back and separated himself and wouldn't eat with all

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<sup>1</sup> It turned out that, though they came from the Jerusalem church, they had not been sent or instructed by James. This was a case of the followers being far worse than the leader: **Acts 15:24 “Since we have heard that some persons have gone out from us and troubled you with words, unsettling your minds, although we gave them no instructions...”**

these gentile converts, because some pretty important people thought they were still unclean and not real Christians, and he didn't want to upset them.

And it felt good to be a little more strict. We think the most strict is the most holy - Peter was more strict - seemed more holy, and was out of step with the Gospel. Strict adherence to a false system of salvation is damning, not holy, even if it looks very religious.

And this was a big movement - all of the Jewish Christians (verse 13) joined in this hypocrisy, including Barnabas, of all people, who was Paul's partner in bringing the good news to the gentiles.

**The gospel is again at stake.** A false teaching has become a fashion. But, as Chesterton said, 'Fallacies do not cease to be fallacies because they become fashions.'

**The health of the church is at stake.** Heresy and untruth first distorts our view of the Gospel, then subsequently distorts our view and treatment of each other. Personal beliefs do not stay internal. We are all acting on our beliefs at all times. And often the result of heresy is the destruction of the Christian community. It harms the people of God by causing division, and the more we are divided the more susceptible we are to further unraveling.

If people believe and stick to the message of the Judaizers, it will create a faith where people who are Jewish are the elite, real Christians, and Gentiles must climb of the ladder of Jewish practice to ever come close.

If they believe that, they will believe there is a group of Christians that are forever unclean, and forever sinful, and forever second class citizens. There isn't an exact parallel to this in our day, but Critical Race Theory and White Supremacy both do something similar: they both create a people who will always be unclean, people who always have more work to do to be accepted by God and by us, and sometimes no work will ever be enough because you're still not the right race. Both schools of thought take the unity granted by grace and replace it with maybe unity someday, by works.

So the gospel that saves is at stake, the health of the church is at stake, and:

**Something is at stake for Peter personally, too.** Peter, you know the Lord! Paul is motivated both by his love for the Gospel and his love for Peter. The point isn't to 'win'

and Peter to 'lose' (as we frame many debates in our day). Paul isn't trying to "own" Peter or publicly humiliate Peter or win an argument, but to win Peter back, to clarify the Gospel in Antioch, as well as in Peter's heart.

Peter is getting back on the endless staircase of legalism which will only wear him out, steal his joy, leave him wondering who knows what about me, leave him concerned about appearances that can never be maintained.

So Paul gets up and publicly calls out Peter. "You're not really keeping the ceremonial law yourself: I saw you ordering a baconator at Wendy's, yet you're acting like you're above all of these people." You're a Jew who doesn't live like a Jew, yet you withhold your fellowship from Gentiles who don't live like Jews.

No passive aggressiveness here, no untagged Facebook status update complaints, no vague gossip, no casual distancing from Peter or verbal undermining of his work behind his back. He confronted him, straight on, no games. For a long time, we've thought Christianity equals "niceness", which often manifests itself as passive aggressiveness instead. But in-person confrontation, without games when the stakes are high like this, is the most Christlike route ESPECIALLY when it comes to the truth of the Gospel.

This seems to be a besetting sin for Peter: fearing people more than God. (Remember the night of the crucifixion, when Peter denied that he knew Jesus because he didn't want a servant girl to turn him in to the authorities.) Peter seems like he wants to be a nice guy, wants to keep everybody happy, and as a result he falls into the sin of hypocrisy and participates in dividing the church.

(Which is a warning to us that we can always fall back into the old sins. Under enough pressure, with our eyes off of Jesus, we can go right back. If Peter could, then I can.)

And being in a high position, even a truly God given one, is no protection from sin. Peter was given a direction to care for the flock by Jesus himself in the flesh ("Feed my sheep"), and yet he still fell - the same way - again.

And Peter here hadn't changed his mind about the Gospel - he still believed in that free grace method that he had affirmed to Paul and Titus and Barnabas in private.



He hadn't changed his mind, he was acting insincerely - he was play-acting, being a hypocrite. Saying he believed one thing while acting like he believed another.

Peter didn't act out of conviction, but out of a fear of the pressure group that the Judaizers had become.

So, to rescue the gospel, to rescue the church, and to rescue Peter, Paul calls him on it because, verse 14:

**Galatians 2:14 But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel,**

These people who claimed to believe the gospel had conduct that was out of step with the Gospel.

**This is a powerful truth, and a very relevant one for us: the Gospel that we get for free also frees us to live in step with it.**

**We don't become Christians by our conduct. But our conduct must be in step with our Christianity.**

**Grace is free, and freeing.**

Peter's life has become out of step with the gospel.

**He believes the gospel**, but he is acting like he doesn't with his fear of people and incessant desire to please people. (If in the Gospel we are already accepted by God, why the need to be accepted by people?)

**He believes the gospel**, but he is acting like he doesn't with his legalism. (If in the gospel Jesus provides everything we need to get to God, why act like those who do more (like following ceremonies) are closer to God.)

**He believes the gospel that unifies by saving all who throw themselves on the mercy of Christ**, but he is acting like he doesn't by participating in dividing the church.

His conduct was out of step with the Gospel.

Christians are people who believe the Gospel and whose conduct, in response, should be in step with the gospel.

In fact, everywhere in the New Testament that we are told to do something or not do something, in the near context, we are reminded of the Gospel. Because the gospel provides our model for living and our power for living.

## **Forgiveness**

**Colossians 3:13** “bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive.”

**Ephesians 4:32** “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

## **Humility**

**Philippians 2:3-8** “3 Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. 4 Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. 5 Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, 6 who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.

## **Loving spouses**

**Ephesians 5:25-26** “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, 26 that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word,

## **Love and Hate in General**

**1 John 4:19-20** “We love because he first loved us. 20 If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. 21 And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.

Anywhere there are imperatives in the New Testament (do's or don'ts), they are always accompanied by the indicative: the announcement of what has been done.

The assumption is that the cross and resurrection of Jesus, if taken into our lives, should be the single most life-transforming thing there is. And that we spend the rest of our lives learning to walk in step with it, learning to live like its true.

So it is worth contending for the truth of free grace.

And it is worth contending for the freedom that comes from believing grace.

It's worth asking ourselves whether our lives are in step with the Gospel, and when they are not, confessing, repenting, and turning again to the Gospel we've wandered from.

### **Prayer in Silence**

### **Pray of Confession**

Father, we are in awe of the love you have given to us in the Gospel. It is a massive gift. Yet we confess that, though we believe it, like Peter, our lives get out of step with it in many ways. In our hypocrisy, in our legalism, in our fear of people and society's verdict more than yours, in our refusal to forgive, in our failure to be humble, and most starkly in our failure to love. So forgive us.

Jesus, we thank you that when you went to the cross, you went to put to death all of the many ways we were out-of-step with you and your truth. You fully paid it all, so we could be free.

Spirit, teach us these things again this morning. Remind us of the gospel in a way that puts our life in step with it. Grant us repentance, forgiveness, and the time of refreshing that comes from believing grace is free, and living in the freedom it brings.

### **Assurance of Pardon**

**Romans 8:1 "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."**

**Questions for Discussion in Small Groups:**

- 1) Do you tend to avoid conflict, or to engage in it too often?
- 2) How do you discern when a confrontation is needed?
- 3) Why do you suppose some don't like the message of free grace?
- 4) How would you answer them?
- 5) Discuss what it means to have conduct that is out of step with the Gospel.
- 6) How is the gospel both the power and the model for the Christian life?