

Well, allow me just for a moment to say what a privilege it is for me to be with you. Um, Joan, as Mike has prayed so helpfully would love to have been here. Um, it's our second home and I want to thank the elders for their kind invitation to be with you. Um, it's, it's an honor to be with you. Well, please turn with me to Paul's letter to the Galatians, the second chapter. We'll read from the verse 11 to the end of the chapter, but allow me first to pray and then to set the context for you.

Father, as we turn together as your people called into your kingdom, but even more into the fellowship of your son, that you will draw near to us by your spirit, the spirit of the risen, exalted, reigning Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that the Holy Spirit would take the word that he expired and cause it to dwell richly within us. We pray your truth will not lie in the surface of our lives, but take possession of all that we are. to the praise of your glory. And we ask it in our Savior's name. Amen.

Paul's letter to the Galatians is an uncomfortable read. In the opening verses, Paul almost explodes with holy anger and indignation. He uses language that is not easy to take. He has heard news that has deeply distressed him. And it's so distressed him that he calls down God's ultimate anathema, his curse, on those who are teaching heresy and error, that his not only blinding people to God's way of salvation in Jesus Christ, but far more significantly, is undermining the glory of Jesus Christ, who he is, and what he has done. And that calls forth from the Apostle Paul, holy indignation, righteous anger, godly invective. He even is willing to say, let these men who so want to add to Christ as to detract from Christ, let them be emasculated.

Now that's not easy language to hear. And perhaps we think, well, is Paul perhaps being a little over the top? Is he perhaps reacting too violently to the errors that are disturbing these Galatian believers? Didn't Paul say to Timothy that the servant of the Lord must be gentle with those who oppose him? Absolutely.

But we need to distinguish this In 2 Timothy, Paul is speaking about men outside of the communion of the saints who are opposing the gospel, who have been blinded by the God of this world. Here, as with our Savior in Matthew 23, when he calls down the woes, the curses, the judgments of God on the spiritual leaders of God's covenant people, here Paul is engaging with men who have wormed their way into the visible fellowship of the people of God. They are wolves in sheep's clothing.

And Paul uses such holy invective, not only to unmask these men, but to awaken the Galatian believers to the seriousness of the errors that they are perhaps beginning to entertain. And even Peter, even Peter, as we'll read in a moment, had become influenced, or at least so In all of these men who had come from Jerusalem with seemingly impeccable ecclesiastical credentials, even Peter was in danger of being led astray from the simplicity that is in Christ. And Paul confronts him to his face, confronts him to his face with the seriousness of his potential capitulation to another gospel, which is no gospel at all.

And so he writes in verse 11 of chapter two, but when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. 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 and the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 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 Gentiles to live like Jews?

We ourselves are Jews by birth, not Gentile sinners, yet we know that a person is not justified, that is made 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 and not by works of law, because by works of the law, no one will be justified. But if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin?

Certainly not. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law, I died to the law so that I might live to God. 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. I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. It must be at least 20 years ago that I first read these words in the works of Thomas Goodwin, I think in volume five.

If you would know what sin is, go to Mount Calvary. I often ask my students when I'm teaching a range of things in seminary, how would you complete this sentence? If you would know what sin is, go to Mount, and almost always, instinctively, the response is Sinai.

No such good one. If you would know what sin is in all its seriousness, in all its ugliness, in all its vileness, you must go to Mount Calvary. Now he isn't saying that Sinai does not convict us of sin, that's not what he's saying. But he's saying if you want to know the depths of sin, the ultimate horror of sin. The acme point of sin seriousness is not Sinai you go to, it's Calvary. And John Owen says something very significantly similar.

He writes in volume six, take thy lusts to the cross But not for relief, but for further aggravation. Take thy lusts to the cross. And you would think, absolutely, where else would you go to be set free, to be cleansed, to be restored unto God? I says, oh no. Take thy lusts to the cross, not first. to be cleansed of them, but to discover the depths of their aggravation to God. We're going to return to those two quotations in a little time.

Why is the Bible so adamant and so insistent that no human being can make themselves acceptable to God and thereby gain eternal life. Why is the Bible so adamant and so insistent that by the works of the law, as we read here, verse 16, by the works of the law, no flesh will be justified in the sight of God? Well, the answer obviously is our passage teaches us Verses 16 and 17, we know a person is not justified by works of law but through faith in Jesus Christ. So we also have believed in Jesus Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law. Why? Because, because by works of the law no one will be justified. And why is that?

We'll look down to chapter three, verse 10. For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse. For it is written, cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law to do them. If you look to yourself, you're staring eternal damnation in the face.

No one can do everything that God's law requires us to do. All have sinned and we fall short or I think a better translation is we lack the glory of God. Paul is saying that In the face of God's holy revelation of himself, of his just requirements of his creatures, we all stand condemned. There is absolute impossibility in any of us, whoever we are, whatever our history or background, whatever our privileges, whoever we are, there is an inherent impossibility

to make yourself acceptable to God by anything you could ever do. By the works of the law, no one will be justified before God.

Now that's a truth that every Bible-taught Christian knows and believes. And we need to be reminded of it every day of our lives because there is an insidious Arminian lurking in every one of our hearts. We need to be reminded every day that no matter who we are, no matter how far along we may be in the Christian life, by the works of the law, no one will be justified in the sight of God. That's an evangelical, biblical truism.

But in our passage in verse 21, Paul has another even more telling argument to persuade us not to seek God's acceptance and favor by our own efforts. Look what he writes in verse 21. If righteousness were through the law, through keeping God's commandments, then Christ died for nothing. If we could in any way anything, to make ourselves right with God, the cross of Christ is the ultimate absurdity. If righteousness were through the law, Christ died for no purpose, he died for nothing. What Paul is teaching us here is that it is the meaning and significance of the death of Christ that more than anything else shuts the door of heaven in the face of everyone who thinks they're good enough for heaven. Let me try and unpack the logic of Paul's categorical statement here and I hope you can follow the apostles logic which is deeply embedded and implicit in the words that he uses here. If righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

If we have the capacity to work our way by effort and obedience into a right and righteous relationship with God, then the purpose of the Father In sending his son to die the death that he died on Calvary's cross was a meaningless absurdity. Think through the logic.

What was the death of Christ? It was the death of the sinless son of God. Holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners. It was God the Son in our flesh who died on Calvary's cross. The beloved one of the Heavenly Father. The one who was ever in the bosom of the Heavenly Father. And then we need to notice it was a divinely purposed death that the Son of God died. It was a death decreed and determined by God from times eternal.

In the covenant of redemption, we don't have time to unpack it, but in the covenant of redemption, the father committed to his son in the power of the Holy Spirit. We need to remember the covenant of redemption is triune. We're not Benatarians, we're Trinitarians. The Father committed to the Son a mission, and the Son embraced that mission that he would accomplish in the power and enabling grace of the Holy Spirit.

It was a divinely decreed and determined and purposed death. It was a death further that brought the Son of God from the glory that was natively his into the darkness and misery and death and desolation of this world. And then climactically, his death was not a martyr's death, it was a penal substitutionary death. Remember what we read in Mark chapter 10, verse 45. The son of man came not to be served, but to serve and to give his life, to give himself a lutron antipollon. to give himself a ransom instead of the many. It was in our place he died, the just for the unjust, to bring us to God. But if righteousness, acceptance with God, were through the law, through us keeping the law, then Christ died to no purpose.

You know, the older I get, the more it seems to me that my answer to almost every question I'm asked in class or by anyone I encounter is the doctrine of God. A few years ago, I was at a Banner of Truth Ministers Conference and I

was talking to some of the men and Jeff Thomas, you know Jeff Thomas, nod if you do, Jeff, a great fellow, he suddenly stops at the table where I'm talking to four or five, John Payne was there, and suddenly Jeff looked at me and he said, Ian, give me your best argument for baptizing babies.

Well, all my friends thought, who is this? And I said, the omniscience of God and the immutability of God. Oh, I didn't think you would say that. And it set off a train of thought in my mind for days and weeks and months to come. Everything goes back to the doctrine of God, the God-revealed doctrine in Holy Scripture.

If righteousness could be by the law, what kind of God is this who would then send his own and only begotten son into the world to be a sin-bearing, sin-atonement propitiation. When someone you meet claims to be good enough to merit God's justifying righteousness, Or that on the balance of things God will ultimately receive them into his presence because, well, the good will outweigh the bad? You need only ask them this one question. Why then did Jesus Christ die the death that he died on Calvary's cross? And who is this God? who would send his son to die such a death, if by the works of the law you could in some measure make yourself acceptable to God. What Paul is teaching us here in Galatians 2 verse 21, is that yes, and he's already stated this, yes, by the works of the law we cannot make ourselves right with God.

We are flawed inherently. Everything we do and everything we are has been tainted, infected by sin. All our righteousnesses, are as filthy rags and the language, you know, we sometimes sanitize the language of the Bible because we're uncomfortable with it. All our righteousnesses are like a filthy menstrual cloth. The Bible is not embarrassed to confront us with the ugliness and the vileness of our sin. Why then did Jesus Christ die on the cross? Because there was no other good enough to pay the price of sin. No other good enough.

He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in. So everything comes back, as I said a little time ago, to the doctrine of God, the revealed God-given explication of himself that he has penned by the Holy Spirit in the Holy Scriptures. Would God have sent his Son, his only begotten Son? And please don't lose the only begottenness of the translation, monogenes huios. It's not the one and only. It's a confusion of, but that's for another day. He's the only begot. Would the father send the only begotten into the world?

If the world had inherently the capacity to save itself, would God, the son in our flesh have endured the unimaginable awfulness of Calvary? drinking the cup of God's holy wrath to its last vile dreg. If by our own works, your works are mine, we could make ourselves right with God. The death of Jesus Christ would make absolute no sense at all. It would become the ultimate cosmic absurdity if righteousness were through the law. And that's what Thomas Goodwin is getting at. If thou wouldst know what sin is, go to Mount Calvary.

God's law, his holy law, which is to be proclaimed, reveals, lays bare the sin that lies entrenched within us. But it's Calvary's cross that most brings that sin into all its ultimate horror. You see, when in Psalm 51, David's great psalm of penitence and repentance, I was so glad to be here this morning for the Bible, the Sunday school hour. And David prays against you, and you only have I sinned, O God, and done that which is evil in your sight. I could imagine people for the first time reading that thinking, really? Really? You've lost the plot, David.

You sinned against Bathsheba when you seduced her. You sinned against your wife so vilely by seducing another man's wife. You sinned against your children by besmirching your fatherhood. You sinned against Uriah by conspiring to murder him. You brought disgrace and dishonor on the household of faith, on the covenant people of God.

I would imagine David would look at you and say, yes, I know, I know, I know. But here is what I have come to know, the heart and horror of my sin. It's not what it's done to me and to others, but what it's done to God. Against you and you only have I sinned, oh God, and done that which is evil in your sight.

And that is what Calvary placards more unfathomably than Sinai. Now as I said, Goodwin is not saying you don't preach the law. If you know Thomas Goodwin, you know he doesn't mean that. Of course we preach the law, but we preach the law, and where is the law ultimately leading us? The law is not an end in itself.

However you understand Romans 10.4, the ultimate telos of the law, and where its curse is most placarded to the cosmos, is not in the thunder of Sinai, but in the silence of Calvary. When all the lights go out, that is why righteousness could never be by the law.

Would God have brought his Son to that? if there were any other way. Remember Jesus, Father, if it be possible in his holy, sinless humanity, Father, if it's possible, if there is any other way, righteously, justly, that you can deal with sin, but not my will, but your will be done. And there was no other way. And so God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. I also quoted the words of John Owen, which I think are in volume six, somewhere about page 79. Bring thy lust to the gospel, he says. not for relief, but for further conviction of its guilt.

Look on him whom thou hast pierced and be in bitterness of soul. Say to thy soul, what have I done? What love, what mercy, what blood, what grace have I despised and trampled on? Is this the return I make to the father for his love, to the son for his blood? to the Holy Ghost for his grace, do I thus requite the Lord? Have I defiled the heart that Christ died to wash, that the Blessed Spirit has chosen to dwell in?"

You know, we have this Lutheran rather than reformed approach, I think, at times to preaching, we think, well, we preach the law to convict people of sin, and then we point them to the gospel for relief. That was never what our reformed forebears understood. We proclaim the law to confront people with the holiness of God, and where is the holiness of God most manifested? In the cosmos, on Calvary's hill. and we preach Christ that people might be brought under deeper, soul-saving conviction of sin. If righteousness were through the law, Christ died for no purpose. Everything comes back. to your doctrine of God.

I hope you read the Sunday School lesson this morning, 2 Samuel 13. You read it, and it makes uncomfortable reading, intentionally, deliberately. You know, Hebrew narrative is framed often to make us deeply uncomfortable, and rarely does it pause to make moral judgments. Joan's reading through, she just finished Deuteronomy, and she would say to me occasionally, What's going on here? I said, well, just keep reading. It leads you to join up the dots. And you come to this.

Why did Jesus Christ die? Because God so loved the world and desired to have that world restored unto him. that he found a way, a just and a holy way, the one and only way, in the sin-bearing, substitutionary, penal, atoning sacrifice of his son. Let me close with just two questions, a little briefer tonight than this morning. The question is this, number one, what do you think of God's son?

Martin Luther, used the words, *crux probat omnia*, the cross is the test of everything. One of my students asked me, have you ever preached a sermon where you didn't quote Latin? I said, absolutely I have, I just can't remember when. *Crux probat omnia*, the cross is the test of everything.

You know, when we meet someone that claims to be a Christian, You know, you might think, well, they're in a suspect church. They might even be in a Methodist church. You know the question to ask them, what think ye of Christ? You want to find out, are they brothers and sisters in blood?

Everything else, there's a place and a time. I'm a Westminster Confession Presbyterian from top of my head to the soles of my feet, but what defines me is not Westminster Calvinism. What defines me is the blood of Jesus Christ, shed for the forgiveness of the sins of many. And I'd better watch out when I dare to speak ill of anyone washed in the blood of Christ, elected from times eternal by the Heavenly Father and well by the Holy Spirit.

If they're family, we need to treat them as family. That doesn't mean you don't argue vigorously, but you do so as brothers in Christ. What do you think of God's Son? Because God's Son didn't die for Calvinists. He died for sinners. And secondly, what love and heart obedience do you give to this God who did not spare His only begotten Son, were the whole realm of nature mine, that were an offering far too small.

Love so amazing, so divine, demands my soul, my life, my all. I've sung those words, as you have, many, many times. And they shame me. They shame me. Are they true Ian? Are you singing them because they're what good reformed Christians sing? Or do you sing them because the pulse beat of your inmost being is saying, you are worthy, you are worthy, you are worthy. if righteousness could come by the law.

Christ's death was just a meaningless absurdity. But it wasn't. And it's Mount Calvary, not Mount Sinai, that ultimately shows us that. Let us pray. Our God and Father, we bless you that when all was sin and shame, a second Adam to the fight, and to the rest you came. Blessed be your holy, great, and glorious name, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.