

Galatians 2: Contending for the Truth of the Gospel

Thank you all. It's a privilege and joy to be preaching here today.

My wife and I love Mick and Steph and appreciate what they are doing here, what you are all doing.

Jesus really is worthy of all glory, isn't He?

And His word is true.

I love that Mick has started a series on the book of Galatians that we'll be continuing today.

Last Sunday Mick launched the series, and if you weren't here,

I encourage you jump online and listen to that this week.

It was a good word from chapter 1 to set up the series,
and I'm here just as a servant to carry the baton through chapter 2,
and Mick will be back next Sunday to finish the book out, Lord willing.

If you don't have a Bible, they're giving away the ones on the back table.

If you do, you can open to Galatians 1 and also hold a spot at Acts 10.

We'll be flipping back and forth. Galatians 1 and Act 10.

And we'll have it up on the screen.

We live in a spiritual war over the glory of God in Christ,
and the enemy and the world are conspiring
to distort our view of the all-sufficiency of Christ
– even trying to distort our understanding of the Gospel.

And Galatians is a great corrective and a great guard against that.

Chapter 2 contains the core of Paul's argument for the true Gospel, and so
it's a happy providence for me that I landed such a glorious assignment.

In order for Paul to drive home his point
about the Gospel of grace through faith alone, apart from works,

he's actually going to use a public confrontation with Peter as the springboard.

Galatians is a fiery and contentious book, because such great things are at stake.

The glory of God and the salvation of His people are at stake.

You can't take it lightly and just agree to disagree

if the people's bad theology severs them from Christ, like Paul says in 5:4.

The only loving response is to show how serious the error is.

But we live in a day and age where this kind of confidence and conviction to engage in confrontation is automatically branded as arrogant and unloving.

“Who do you think you are, that you’re so smart that you know without doubt that your opinion is the truth that everyone has to agree with? You’re an arrogant jerk.”

And that intimidates so many Christians from taking a stand and speaking the truth with conviction.

Now obviously we don’t want to be jerks.

We want to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit as we seek to persuade others.

And we want to be humble.

But we shouldn’t think that we can’t be both humble and courageous in our convictions at the same time.

The Lord Jesus was. Paul was.

And in the process of seeking to explain and apply Galatians 2,

I'm going to speak boldly and with conviction,

as the Scriptures command me to.

And I'll fit right into the mold for the cultured to say,

“He's an arrogant jerk.”

(And it will be true in deeper, more pervasive ways than they know,

because they don't know me as well as I know me.)

But boldly proclaiming the truth of the Gospel is not arrogance,

because I didn't invent it. I received it.

I'm not asserting myself and my opinions.

I'm saying that I'm a sinful, rebellious fool,

who has been given a new heart by the grace of God

through my faith in His crucified and resurrected Son, Jesus Christ,

and I'm just passing on His truth,

which He has made sufficiently clear in this Book He breathed out.

It's not all equally clear, but the main points of the Gospel are sufficiently clear.

And I have humbled myself to submit to the words of God in context,

and this is what it says.

I hope to model this for you like Mick has modeled it.

I hope you appreciate how courageous his message was a couple of weeks ago – given our cultural environment.

He titled it “Clarity and Compassion,” and because I dig that alliteration, I’d like to add another “C” to it: “Clarity, Compassion, and Courage.”

Who cares if you have clarity and compassion
if you don’t have the courage to share the truth?

In fact, maybe you don’t clearly see what’s at stake

and don't really have compassion until it moves you

to risk your reputation and risk your relationships

in order to speak the truth that they desperately need to embrace.

So that's one fruit that I'm praying for in this message: that God would

continue to put courage in our hearts to contend for the truth of the Gospel.

That's Jude 3, a verse I've been thinking about a lot lately:

it says, "... I found it necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the

faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints."

Contend, wrestle, argue, persuade so that the objective truths of the Gospel

are not replaced with falsehoods.

That's what Mick was doing a couple weeks ago,
especially when we see Jude's context that comes in verse 4: "For [here's
why you need to contend – for] certain people have crept in unnoticed who
long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who
pervert the grace of our God into sensuality...."

That's happening today in many churches in our city and country
– grace exploited as a license for immorality –
and we need to contend for the faith,
the truth of the Gospel as it affects all things.

And that's what Paul was doing in Galatians 2.

So let's turn there and pray for grace to learn from God today. [prayer]

Galatians 2 flows uninterrupted from the narrative of Galatians 1.

So to remind ourselves of what we saw last week,

Paul opened so strongly and in 1:8, wrote,

“But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed.”

In verse 9, Paul repeats himself to drive home the gravity of this.

A person who propagates a false gospel will be judged, condemned, and

punished eternally because he hasn't truly believed
and because God is jealous for the purity of the good news
of glory of His beloved Son.

1:10 is a surprising transition, to me, about not trying to please man,
but to serve Christ (and we'll come back to that because of chapter 2),
and then in 1:11 Paul begins an autobiographical section for this reason:
to establish that the Gospel he proclaims was not made up by any man;
it came by revelation of Jesus Christ.

He stresses again in verses 16 and 17 that he wasn't taught this Gospel by anyone, not even the apostles in Jerusalem.

And that Jerusalem reference is going to be important for our chapter.

It seems the false teachers were claiming superiority

because of their Jerusalem connection,

probably claiming authority from the Jerusalem apostles.

So here we go: 2:1 says, "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.”

What trip is this and what's this revelation that motivated it?

I believe it's the prophecy from Agabus in Acts 11:27-30 about a coming famine. 11:29 says, “So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” (And that Saul is also called Paul.)

So Barnabas and Paul took this financial gift to the Jerusalem church to prepare them for a famine,

and while Paul is there, he has this private meeting to lay out the Gospel as he was proclaiming it to Gentiles.

(Gentiles are non-Jewish ethnicities.)

He meets with “those who seemed influential”

– he’s still distancing himself from the Jerusalem apostles

but he eventually names them in verse 9 as James, Peter, and John.

He writes that he met with them, “in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain.” That’s kinda strange.

Surely Paul didn't really entertain the thought that his miracle-working ministry, which was commissioned by and empowered by the blindingly glorious, resurrected God-Man, could have possibly been in vain.

We'll have to read on to see what his concern was.

Verse 3: "But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 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— to them we did not yield in

submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” So that just heated up quickly.

I thought we were just having this nice donation and gospel party, and then this.

Who are these people who crash the meeting?

It seems they’re the people who caused Paul the concern in the first place.

If these people win,

then his Gospel work among the Gentiles will have been in vain,

emptied of its power, and to no effect.

He calls them “false brothers.”

They claim to be Christian brothers, but they’re not.

They started causing trouble before this Acts 11:27 trip

– back at the beginning of Acts chapter 11.

It’s worth looking at that context,

because it sets the stage for so much of Galatians 2.

In Acts 10, Peter was praying on the roof, hungry, falls into a trance
and is given a vision.

Something like a great sheet came down from heaven

with all kinds of animals on it.

A voice says, “Rise, Peter, kill and eat.”

Peter says, “No way!” because it’s against the Law of Moses

for a Jew to eat these unclean, common, unsanctified animals.

The voice says, “What God has made clean, do not call common.”

But Peter probably thinks it’s a test, and he’ll pass it if he keeps refusing.

So this has to happen a second time and a third time.

Then it’s over, and Peter’s wondering, “What was that all about?”

The Spirit says to him in 10:20 to go with the men downstairs

who are looking for him, because the Spirit sent them.

Turns out they are men from Cornelius,

an unclean Gentile centurion.

Peter goes and 10:28 is so key for understanding what we'll read in Gal. 2.

Peter said to Cornelius and his relatives and guests: “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.”

This is amazing.

The Law said not to eat the kinds of food the Gentiles did

(especially not dedicated to the kinds of gods Gentiles often did),
and the current Jewish tradition was to not even associate with them
– as if that would ensure that you don't break the Law.

But now Peter has been taught by the Spirit
not to call these Gentiles unclean, but rather, to evangelize them.

So Peter proclaims the Gospel, and before he even gets to the altar call,
the Holy Spirit falls on the ones
who heard the message with faith.

10:45 says, “And the believers from among the circumcised who had come with Peter were amazed, because the gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out even on the Gentiles.” *Even on the Gentiles.*

11:19 explains that up to this point,

the Jewish believers had only been sharing the Gospel with Jews, and not Gentiles!

I don’t get what part of “Go and disciples all the peoples,” “all the ethnicities” they didn’t understand,

but their racial and spiritual superiority based on the Law of Moses was a strong stronghold that was just now starting to come down.

Peter exercised the keys of the Kingdom to invite these Gentiles in.

And here they are speaking in tongues and magnifying God for Christ.

This is new. This is surprising to the Jews with Peter.

10:47, Peter declared, “‘Can anyone withhold water for baptizing these people, who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?’ And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they asked him to remain for some days.”

Flow right into Acts 11, “Now the apostles and the brothers who were throughout Judea heard that the Gentiles also had received the word of God.

So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcision party criticized him, saying, ‘You went to uncircumcised men and ate with them.’”

These are the kind of guys who slipped in to Paul’s meeting with Peter, James, and John.

The “circumcision party.”

They have “believed” that Jesus is the Christ,

but they believe that the Law of Moses is still in place:

you must be circumcised to be a part of the people of God.

I mean, God put that in place even before the Law.

He gave it as the sign of the covenant with Abraham and his descendents.

He said in Genesis 17:14, “Any uncircumcised male... shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant.”

So, before Christ came, if a Gentile wanted to be a part of God’s people, he had to be circumcised, baptized, offer sacrifice, and take on the yoke of the Law, commit to living according to the Law of God.

The “circumcision party” quote-unquote “believed” in Jesus, but they were Pharisaical to the core (15:5 says they were Pharisees).

And they didn’t understand what it meant that Christ fulfilled the Law.

They didn't understand the radical change to the New Covenant in His blood.

So when Peter comes back from maybe the most important mission trip ever, they criticize him.

Peter responds by recounting the story of the vision.

In 11:12, he says,

“And the Spirit told me to go with them, making no distinction.”

That's huge. Remember that for later: “making no distinction.”

He recaps his Gospel presentation and the Spirit's work

and concludes in 11:17,

“If then God gave the same gift to them as he gave to us *when we believed* [underline, when we believed] in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could stand in God's way?”

What do you think? How is Peter doing?

We're going to see in Galatians 2 a later time when Peter did horribly, but he's rockin' it here.

Verse 18 says, “When they heard these things they fell silent. And they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.’”

The majority conclusion is that God gave to Gentiles

– apart from works of the Law – the gift of repentance that leads to life.

Repentance is the other side of the coin of faith.

True faith includes repentance, and true repentance includes faith,

so repentance is used as the summary statement here.

Repentance is a change of mind about self, sin, God, Christ,

so when God gives that gift, you change your mind

from loving sin, living for self, and disbelieving God and Christ

to hating sin, denying self, and glorifying God in Christ through faith.

This passage says that heart attitude

– before any works that follow it –

that heart attitude seals Gentiles *and Jews* with the Holy Spirit

in right relationship with God.

But at least some of the circumcision party weren't convinced.

They're still causing problems

at this meeting at the end of chapter 11

(this Galatians 2 meeting),

and later in Acts 15,

and guys from their group were surely the ones preaching

the false gospel in Galatia that prompted Paul to write this letter.

So back in Galatians 2, Paul says these false brothers spied out their freedom in Christ. “In Christ” is key, and we’ll see at the end of the chapter.

The freedom is that Titus, a Gentile,

was being embraced as a true brother in Christ

even though he wasn’t circumcised.

But the Pharisee fake Christians wanted to enslave him,
to compel him to be circumcised,
because they thought his faith wasn't enough.

He wasn't truly accepted by God
unless he was circumcised and obeyed the Law of Moses.

Paul says in verse 5: “to them we did not yield in submission even for a
moment.”

We didn't think twice about agreeing with them
and treating Titus like he had to be circumcised to be in right

relationship with God and with God's people.

Titus was already righteous by faith!

So Paul writes, "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's Paul's motivation: to preserve the truth of the Gospel.

You almost wonder if this is the whole reason Paul took Titus with him.

Titus was the test case,

and still-uncircumcised Titus is proof positive

that the Jerusalem apostles agree with Paul:

we come into right relationship with God

through faith alone,

apart from works of the Law.

That's why Paul writes this story to the Galatians.

Don't be fooled by the false teachers: this issue was settled years ago!

“The truth of the Gospel” has been preserved for you Gentiles

(and that means us Gentiles), *for* you, for your advantage.

The false gospel is damning,

but the true Gospel is life-giving and freeing.

And it has been preserved.

In verses 6-10, Paul walks this tight-rope of continuing to distance himself from the Jerusalem apostles (they didn't teach me the Gospel, they added nothing to it) and yet reporting that they supported him in this God-given gospel.

Let's clip through this part, starting at verse 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. 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 (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the

circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), and when James and Cephas

[Cephas is the Aramaic name that Jesus gave to Simon. It means Rock.

“You will be called Rock, and on this rock I will build My Church.” Cephas is Aramaic for Rock. Petros is Greek for rock, and Peter is the English version of his name]

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. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Now verses 11-21 are the main section of this chapter.

After this theological unity in Jerusalem,
something happens that brings a practical division,
so verse 11 starts with “but”:

“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” – that eating is good;

Peter’s acting on the revelation from the Spirit in Acts 10

that God makes no distinction

between Jewish believers and Gentile believers, cleansing them both

by faith in Christ.

“But” – in the middle of verse 12, “but when they [certain men from James in Jerusalem] came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”

There they are again: the circumcision party.

Peter has already in Acts 11 courageously contended for the faith against this party.

But they haven't given up,

and now he's acting like old Peter, natural Peter,

warming-his-hands-at-the-fire Peter,

scared of a little girl who asks, “Aren't you Jesus' disciple?”

And he curses and denies *for a third time* even knowing Jesus
because he feared for his life.

That old man isn't completely sanctified yet,
and here he is fearing the circumcision party.

They'll go back to Jerusalem and
tell everyone about me, disregarding the Law.
I'll lose face.

Maybe I'll lose my standing as a leader of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem.

He was trying to please men

(against what Paul wrote 1:10),

trying to please the circumcision party,

instead of being a servant of Christ.

And so he pulled back from the Gentile Christians in Antioch.

Verse 13: “And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.”

This isn't just an awkward high school lunch table moment,

when a friend leaves your table to sit five feet away at another table.

This would mean a totally different meal,

a kosher meal, with ceremonial washings,

probably in a different location,

to not be contaminated by the unclean Gentiles.

And it's hypocrisy because Peter already knows better.

He opened the door for the Gentiles through his mission to Cornelius' house.

He knows God makes no distinction.

He knows God gifts repentance unto life to Gentiles

apart from works of the Law.

There's not a theological disagreement between Paul and Peter.

They agree: we're saved by grace alone through faith alone.

But Peter's acting like a hypocrite.

And as a leader, he leads astray the rest of the Jewish Christians,
even Paul's co-worker, Barnabas!

And Paul's not having it. Verse 11: "I opposed him to his face, because he
stood condemned" – by God, on the basis of his own words.

Verse 14 says that Paul rebuked Peter in front of them all.

And years ago that messed with me.

Because I knew Jesus said in Matthew 18,

if your brother sins, go and show him his fault just between the two of you.

So was Paul wrong to do this in front of everyone?

Now I think that this isn't a Matthew 18 situation.

Peter wasn't the only one who sinned; all the Jewish Christians sinned against all the Gentile Christians.

So Peter wasn't the only one who needed to hear it; they all needed to hear it.

Paul just addressed Peter because he was the leader;

he was responsible for Jesus' flock, and he led them astray.

Verse 14: “But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel [there it is again, Paul is courageously contending for 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?”

That’s so significant.

I wish I could show this verse to some Jewish Christians today and even Gentile Christians who are doing this Hebrew roots thing and observing the Jewish festivals and the Jewish law.

Cephas lived like a Gentile, not like a Jew.

Not that he was out there partying, fornicating, idol-worshipping.

Not living immorally.

But Cephas did not live as though he was under the authority of the old covenant law.

Because Christ had freed him from that and justified him by faith.

Paul says the same thing about himself in 1 Corinthians 9:20, I am not under the Law.

But all of a sudden, Cephas, who normally lives like a Gentile, starts acting like it's bad to live like a Gentile.

He goes back under the Law,
and that action has the effect, Paul says, of “forcing the Gentiles to live like
Jews.” How is that?

Because it sends the message to the Gentile Christians,
“Yeah, you believe in Jesus,
but you’re still unclean.

You’re still inferior.

You’re still outside of the people of God.

You’re not accepted by God unless you become like us,
circumcised, law-keeping Jews.” *And that’s a lie!*

It's a false gospel!

And deep down Cephas knows it.

So Paul rebukes him, "How dare you?"

Now, ESV puts the end quotes after that question in verse 14,

as though that's all Paul reported of his rebuke.

But the original Greek that Paul composed

did not have punctuation like quotation marks.

So it requires interpretation from context

to figure out where quotations start and end.

And I think they got it wrong here,
and other commentators like Douglas Moo think they got it wrong.
They need to get the heading above verse 15 out of our way
because headings weren't in the original Greek either,
and they need to carrying the quotation clear to the end of verse 21.
In fact, that's what NASB does, ends the quote after 21.
This is all Paul rebuking the hypocrites
and reporting it for the sake of the Galatians.
I think we can be confident in that
because of the emphatic "we ourselves" in verse 15

and the “we also” in verse 16 and 17.

He doesn’t change audiences until 3:1.

In 2:15, he’s still talking to Peter, “We ourselves,” “we Jewish Christians.”

Let’s read on with that in mind.

Verse 15: “We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners.”

Paul is using “Gentile sinners” the way that prejudiced Jews would.

Some versions even put it in scare quotes, “Gentile sinners.”

Those unclean Gentiles – they’re obviously sinners

because they don’t obey the Law of God.

Verse 16: “yet we know”

- Paul is appealing to the unified theology that he has with Cephas
- “yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law.”

Pause and look at the footnote that ESV gives behind justified:

at the bottom of the text, “Or counted righteous.”

Justified is this beautiful theological term from the good old days,

but it comes from the same Hebrew and Greek roots

that translate “righteous.”

So it’s unfortunate that we have two different English words,

and we can miss the connection.

To justify means to declare righteous.

At the end of the age,

all flesh will stand before God's throne for judgment.

He will declare each person guilty or righteous.

And righteous means you are innocent, not guilty, in the right.

The standard of right is not some impersonal law,

but the righteous God who created you,

so to be righteous means to be in right relationship with God.

Now we see in verse 16, Paul appeals to Cephas, “yet we know that a person is not declared righteous by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also [not just Gentiles, but we Jews also] have believed into Christ Jesus, in order to be declared righteous by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be declared righteous.”

Paul is so emphatic here. Not by works. Through faith. We believed. By faith. Not by works. Not by works.

And this last phrase is kind of awkward Greek, so it doesn't get translated literally, but Paul really said,

“Because by works of the law all flesh will not be declared righteous.”

When I saw that Paul said, “all flesh,”

it reminded me of Romans 8:3,

which says that it was impossible for the Law to make us righteous

because it was weakened by the flesh, by our natural man,

which is depraved apart from the new birth by the Spirit.

It’s just a quick hint here in Galatians that it’s not the Law’s fault.

The law is good.

He’ll argue in chapter 3 that it served its purpose well,

but it was a temporary purpose, until Christ came.

It couldn't justify us,

but Paul isn't dogging God's law

– we were the problem, our flesh.

And both Jews and Gentiles have it, this sinful nature

that makes it morally impossible to perfectly obey God's Law.

Only Christ could do that, born of a virgin, holy, the God-Man,

the Son in perfect obedience to God the Father.

Christ perfectly fulfilled the Law for us (Mt. 5:17).

He fulfilled all righteousness (Mt. 3:15).

And Christ also fulfilled the righteous requirement of the Law
that those who break it deserve to die.

Chapter 3 will explain more clearly that He took our place on the tree.

He took the penalty we deserved.

He absorbed the wrath of God against our sins,

so that God could be the righteous Judge that He is

and yet we could be spared

and declared righteous in Christ.

Outside of Christ, Cephas and Paul,

trying to earn righteousness by works of the Law,

would be judged guilty,

because they didn't perfectly keep it.

But by believing into Christ, being united with Christ,

God credited their sins to Christ's account

and punished Him for it,

and God credited Christ's righteousness to their account

and rewarded them for it.

This is what Martin Luther called the "sweet exchange."

He wrote, “Therefore, my dear brother, learn Christ and Him crucified; learn to pray to Him despairing of yourself, saying, ‘You, Lord Jesus, are my righteousness and I am Your sin; You have taken on Yourself what You were not, and have given to me what I am not.’”

This is the truth of the Gospel.

Paul reminded Cephas, “we know” this. We believe this.

Then, in verse 17, he answered

what was probably an accusation by the circumcision party:

“But if, in our endeavor to be declared righteous in Christ, we too were found to be sinners [remember how he used that in verse 15, “Gentile sinners,” now: because we know we can become righteous only in union with Christ and we seek to be declared righteous in Christ, not by the Law, we’ve been found out by the circumcision party to be like Gentile sinners, not obeying the Law],

is Christ then a servant of sin?”

They probably accused that his teaching made Christ a promoter of sin by leading Jewish Christians to disregard the Law and live like Gentiles.

But that accusation only works if it really is a sin for Cephas and the rest

to disregard the Law.

But it's not.

Just the opposite.

It's actually a sin to keep trying to be right with God by works.

So Paul answers in verse 17: "Certainly not!"

Verse 18: "For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor."

What did Paul tear down? The Law.

He didn't tear it down like it wasn't God's word.

He tore it down as the way to get right and stay right with God.

He was living like the Law was no longer the authority over him.

But if he rebuilds it,

if he goes back under it's authority,

enslaves himself to it, like Cephas just did,

then he would prove himself a transgressor

– because he hadn't been obeying it,

and never would perfectly.

Verse 19: “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.”

This is tricky.

I *think* he might be condensing his fuller theology:

the law required my death, and Christ died for me,

and because God united me with Christ through faith,

Christ's death through the law

was my death through the law.

I embraced that break with the Law

so that I may live in relation to God.

I think this identification with Christ is what he's saying

because of some of this other writings and
because I think he unpacks it more explicitly in the next phrase,
which seems parallel, verse 20: “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.”

This verse is so famous and for good reason.

Paul’s telling Peter and us:

righteousness is not about faith and *then* works of the Law.

It’s about faith and then faith and faith – always faith.

Because there's only One Man who can live the Christian life,
and that's Christ.

So the aim of the Christian life isn't
doing works in our own strength to please God;
it's realizing that God has already proven He is pleased with us,
on the basis of faith,
by putting us in Christ and Christ in us.

The aim of the Christian life is to put no confidence in the flesh,
and every moment
depend upon Christ in me,

to relate to Christ in me by faith,

to discover His thoughts and His feelings and His will communicated to me,

to agree with Him,

and let His life come out of me.

Amen? May it be so in us.

Paul closes the report of his rebuke in verse 21.

It's an argument he hasn't made yet,

so it seems kind of abrupt as the closing.

But I think here we start to see

what's ultimately behind Paul's jealousy for the truth of the Gospel.

"I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose." That's heavy.

The legalists believed they had to get right with God through the works of the Law.

If that was possible, then Christ died for no reason.

But in truth, Christ had to die to redeem us from the curse of the Law – because we all, Jews and Gentiles, rebelled against God – and couldn't undo that fact.

But when we put our faith in Christ's finished work,

then God gives us the status of righteousness as a gift of grace

(Rom. 5:17 calls it a gift, by grace).

We didn't deserve it.

We didn't work for it.

It was a gift of grace.

But if righteousness comes by works, then it's not grace.

It's a paycheck.

You earned it.

And then who gets credit?

You do. You are righteous.

You obeyed the law so well that you earned right standing with God.

No! That's impossible!

And that presumption steals glory from God!

God designed this world with sin and depravity

and helplessness and a gift of righteousness

to knock out from under us all grounds of human boasting

(Rom. 3:27, Ephesians 2:8-9),

to eliminate all human boasting,

so that we might be for the praise of the glory of God's grace (Eph. 1:6).

Righteousness is a gift of grace,

and the Giver gets the glory!

That's why righteousness is on the basis of faith,

because faith doesn't work to earn,

faith just receives the gift of grace

– and praises the glory of God's grace!

So here we see Paul's jealousy.

The false gospel sets aside (literally, sets aside) the grace of God.

Don't need it.

I'm workin' here.

And that denies God the glory He deserves

for the surpassing riches of grace

He lavished on us at the cost of His beloved Son's life.

And we don't want to be like that,

so let's close with two very serious applications.

Number one: like Mick said, start with ourselves.

Do we trust in our works?

Maybe test it like this:

when we sin, do we think we have to do works to get right with God?

Or do we radically believe in the grace of God?

That He declares righteous the ungodly believer (Rom. 4:5).

Romans 8:1, “Therefore, now there is not one condemnation for the ones in Christ Jesus,”

not because of what we’ve done, but because of God what did in Christ.

Yes, when we sin,

God is displeased.

He’s grieved.

We should sense that as He disciplines us in love for our good (Hebrews 12).

But a believer's sin does not undo the declaration of righteousness that God has spoken over Him.

The believer isn't supposed to do some work to get back right with that.

The believer is supposed to look to Christ as His righteousness,

to give Him the glory for His grace,

apologize,

and pray for more grace to live by faith,

not taking your eyes off Him next time.

This is the scandal of justification by grace through faith alone.

And I plead with you to embrace it.

And understand that the works that follow faith – fruit –
don't earn anything.

They don't add anything to justification

– because they're worked by grace, by Christ living in you.

So works don't earn,

they actually increase your dependence upon grace – to God's glory.

Secondly, do we have the clarity, compassion,

and courage to contend for this truth when it is distorted? Do I?

Here's one example.

Galatians 2 is directly applicable

to the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church today.

They don't believe justification is a declaration of God

on the basis of faith alone.

They believe God infuses actual righteousness into people

through the sacrament of water baptism,

either as a baby or a youth or adult.

So the baby is actually, personally righteous in nature.

But then he'll sin and mess that up.

He'll lose his justification.

Then he needs faith *plus works*.

He needs the sacraments, like penance,

which they've called the second plank of justification.

Through penance (contrition, confession, and works of satisfaction)

we can make up for our sin and merit righteousness.

Unless we sin again and mess that up,

and then we need more penance to earn more righteousness.

And if we didn't square it away, we'll go to purgatory
to work off the remainder of the penalty.

That, according to Galatians, is a false gospel.

Jesus, hanging on the Cross, did not cry out,

"It has been started. Now you go finish it yourself."

He cried, "It has been finished." Tetellestai!

The debt has been paid in full.

There's no more work to be added to it.

Just believe and receive the free gift of righteousness.

Catholic teaching dishonors Jesus
by diminishing the all-sufficiency of His work
for those who trust in Him alone.

Now I don't doubt that there are some Catholics
who are truly born of the Spirit
and truly trust Christ alone,
in spite of the official Catholic teaching.
To God's glory.

But many (millions) are bewitched (Galatians 3:1),
bewitched into trusting in their own works for right standing with God.
And that's grave.

Galatians 5:4 says that kind of person has been severed from Christ
and has fallen away from grace.

If we have clarity on that and compassion for them,
then we should find courage to risk our reputation
and risk relationships in order to contend for the truth of the Gospel.

That would be the loving thing to do.

I pray we all get equipped for that and go do it

– for the glory of God

and for the everlasting good of Catholics who need to embrace real grace.

Let's stand as I close. (And the worship team can jump back up here.)

We gotta contend for the truth of Gospel,

not trying to please man, trying to serve Christ (Gal. 1:10).

Not trying to please man, trying to save man.

And it just might happen.

Paul confronted Peter, but doesn't tell us in Galatians how Peter responded.

But I encourage you to go and read Acts 15 on your own.

In Acts 15 you'll see Peter back on his game.

The confrontation was worth it,

and God worked through it.

So we Gentiles can celebrate to this day

that all flesh can only be saved

by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone for the glory of God alone.

Amen?

I'll pray, and then we're going to sing a closing song.

During that time, I'll be up here, and some leaders will be up here,
if you want someone to talk to or want some prayer for anything.

If, before tonight, you hadn't clearly, decisively trusted in Christ alone
to get right with God, I hope you started to during the sermon.

If you're not quite sure,

or if you just want to process through that with someone,

we're here and would be delighted to love on you.

If anyone wants to rebuke me for anything I said,

I'm open for that, truly;

I'll stick around for it.

I only ask that you wait until after the worship and prayer time is finished,

in case I could be ministering to someone else's need at this time.

Let's pray.