

Despising God's Grace

Galatians 2:21

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TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians Chapter 2:11-21

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed. For before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also were found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which 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 set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Let us pray.

Father, I ask that You would open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of Your law. Speak, O Lord, to us, we pray. Teach us, we pray. Arrest our hearts by the truth of Your word, and Father, bring us to the place of humility that we might readily receive Your word and that we might be exalted to rejoice with You because of You. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

We come to verse number 21 of this chapter, which is the last verse of this chapter in Galatians Chapter 2, and verse 21 summarizes and concludes the entire section that spans from verse number 11 down to verse 21. And in this section, verse 11 through to verse number 21, particularly from verse 14 onward, what we have here is Paul's unfolding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ and those implications that result because of it. Implications being the unity of God's people because all of God's people are accepted through the righteousness of Jesus Christ and therefore accepted by God should be received by one another. And also, from verse 19 and onward, he explains that this doctrine of justification not only leads us to the implications of Christian unity but also to holiness of life. And all this is done within the context of this apostolic confrontation between Paul and Peter there at Antioch. And Paul has been demonstrating to the churches of Galatia, in recounting this situation that happened at Antioch, he's been demonstrating the relationship between union with Christ and justification and he's been proving that dying to the law does not mean that one cannot live unto God. He's also been demonstrating that faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the law, doesn't make Christ there the minister of sin. In fact, quite contrary to that, just because we are saved by faith alone, by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, that doesn't mean Christ is the minister of sin. Christ is not the minister of sin; in fact, He is the very power that leads His people to holiness and righteousness of life. He also has been demonstrating that union with Christ, therefore, is that true power for holiness of life. Our death with Christ, our resurrection with Christ in our conversion, is the very, if I could say, the very safeguard of our holiness. That new covenant promises come through that very truth. And so, Paul's whole argument in this passage can be summed up in three words: simply this, Christ is sufficient. He is sufficient as the sinner's justification, as the sinner's forgiveness and righteousness, and therefore, they are to find their sin is not to find righteousness anywhere else but in Christ alone. And not only is it Christ sufficient as a sinner's righteousness but also as the believer's power in sanctification, that He lives in us, that by faith in Him, He uniting us to Himself, we will bear fruit unto God as a result of our union with Him. And Paul's whole argument is to demonstrate that Christ is sufficient, Christ is complete, His gospel is all that the sinner needs.

This is also said in 1 Corinthians 1:30-31 by Paul also himself. He says, "But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption, that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'" Paul lifts up Christ as everything to us: our righteousness and our sanctification, our wisdom, and everything that we need is found in Him. And verse 21 is summarizing this entire section, and verse 21 basically talks about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as our Savior and for righteousness. The sufficiency of Christ in the

gospel is said in verse number 21, and the way to understand this passage is to focus your attention upon the middle part of that text because in verse 21, "I do not set aside the grace of God," and this is the part you need to focus on, "for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." And what Paul is saying here is presenting a hypothetical; he's saying if this is true, if righteousness, if our justification, if our acceptability before God can be established by obedience to the law of God, then this would logically follow: Christ died in vain.

And the issue at Antioch spoke specifically to this as well. If you remember, as we just read this morning, that the gospel was at stake at Antioch. Peter's hypocrisy in verse number 14 led to him, as it were, walking not straightforward or not according to the truth of the gospel. Peter was walking in a way that was out of step with the truth of the gospel. Peter's isolation from the Gentile believers made the Gentile believers feel, or communicated to all the believers there, that you need more than Christ to be accepted by God. Now we know this was hypocrisy; Peter himself did not believe this. But Paul's whole argument is to say, Peter, if you are going to behave in a way that the Gentiles do not belong to the people of God because they are Gentiles and not under the law as the Jews are, then you are essentially saying by your life that acceptability before God, righteousness before God, comes through the law.

Now, Peter preached the opposite to that, but his life and his testimony at that very moment in Antioch spoke the opposite to that. And Paul's response to Peter's hypocrisy was simply this: that all of us are sinners, both Jew and Gentiles, and that we need to repent and believe in Jesus so that we might be received by God in Christ. In other words, what he's saying is, it's not by the works of the law that a man is just before God; it is not by what a man does or doesn't do necessarily that makes him accepted before God. It is solely upon the work of Jesus Christ. If we seek to be justified by Christ, is what he says, that we're justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law.

And so, Peter responds to this situation by laying down the truth of justification by faith, and then Paul concludes simply this: that God's people are not the ones that live as Jews. Remember what he says here, "If you, being a Jew, live as a Gentile, compel Gentiles to live as Jews," right? He's challenging Peter's whole behavior, and what he's saying is, God's people are not to be known by whether or not they are Judaizers, whether or not they're under the Old Covenant, whether or not they are keeping the Mosaic law. No, what Paul is simply saying is that God's people are those that have faith in Jesus Christ. These are the true people of God; these are the ones that are accepted before God as His own.

But what if Paul was wrong? What if Paul got this all muddled up? What if the law was somewhat necessary for our justification or acceptance before God? What if the Judaizers were right, and you know that it was not enough just to have faith in Jesus Christ; you need faith in Jesus Christ plus circumcision, or plus baptism, or plus keeping the law of Moses, or plus this, and then God will truly accept you? Or maybe, as you navigate your way through this, God will weigh up your good works and bad works on the final day, and you'll see whether or not you'll get in. What if Paul was wrong? What if verse 21b is true, righteousness coming through the law? Well, Paul gives an answer to that. Paul is basically saying, if I'm wrong, if justification by faith alone is wrong, if a person's acceptance before God is by anything else than the righteousness of Jesus Christ, this is the consequence of that belief: Christ died in vain.

That's a bold conclusion. In fact, it's a very confronting conclusion, isn't it? Paul has just escalated this whole thing. This is not a matter of preference. This is not a matter of, "This is what you believe, this is what I believe, and it's inconsequential." You know, like, "That's fine." Paul raises the stakes here to the point to demonstrate that if you believe that your acceptance before God has anything to do with your own righteousness and your own works and law, then Christ died for nothing. That's high treason; that's blasphemy to the highest degree, to say that Christ died for nothing, to say that Christ died in vain is high treason and blasphemy against God Himself. And we would all agree with that. But what Paul is saying is, so if self-justification is possible by all covenant signs, feast, law-keeping, then Christ died without cause; He died needlessly, He died aimlessly, He died without purpose. If that were true, love, what one man said, he said this: "If people can make themselves good by doing what is called their duty, then the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus constitute the greatest mistake that was ever made in the universe. If a man can be really good, can make himself all that God can possibly desire him to be of his own motion and will and by the resources of his own invention and energy, then the mediation of Christ Jesus was a great and generous expenditure of pain and life and sorrow, and an expenditure that ended in nothing." That's pretty serious. What Paul is saying here is extremely serious.

Think about the babe born in a manger of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Think about the Son of God coming and living among men, working by the sweat of His brow as a carpenter, laboring, God incarnate, tired, tempted, tried, tested, and rejected, sent to an old rugged cross to die for our sins. Think about all that the Son of God went through in the accomplishment of our redemption. Paul says that the sum and total of all that suffering and pain, the incarnation, the death, the burial, the resurrection, the life of Jesus, all of it, all of it, you might as well throw it in the rubbish tin. It's

worth nothing; it's without any value; it's without any cause; it's without any effect; it's vain; it's empty if this hypothetical statement is true, that I may obtain a righteousness for myself by the law apart from Jesus Christ. Then forget about it; God wasted His time, sent His Son to die for nothing, and we've got to now work out what Jesus came to do anyway.

But you might think, well, no, no, no, look, it's not about that; it's just about helping Jesus out, right? So He does His part; I do my part. Like, yes, He died for our sins, but then what ends up happening is I contribute all the goodness that I can contribute to my own righteousness, and then whatever's lacking, Jesus kind of fills in the gap, and therefore we have a combined righteousness. Well, there are times when helping becomes an insult, and I can tell you this is one of those occasions. If you believe that there's a time when helping becomes an insult because it insults a person's autonomy, it insults a person's ability, and it insults a person's dignity. You say, how so? Think about the micromanager. He's always helping, helping by informing every decision, every move, checking every detail, even completing tasks for the employee. We look at that micromanager, and we say, you're not actually helping; you're insulting your employee. You are showing control and distrust. You are essentially saying that they are unable to carry out the tasks you have given them to do.

What about the well-intentioned parent who treats their adult child as if they're still in diapers, you know, incompetent of life's most basic decisions? You know, many kids obviously don't understand their handicaps, and therefore parents do definitely need to continue to speak into their life, but we're talking about the well-intentioned, overbearing parent that doesn't see their children growing. Well, how does it make the child feel? Inadequate, incompetent, makes the child feel as if they are useless and good for nothing.

Let me give a more extreme example. Well, the first one may not be that extreme, but let's say you came over to my house for dinner, and we put on a nice spread. My wife has worked and laboriously gone ahead to deliver this beautiful meal, put it out on the table before you, and you pull out from under the table your own caddy, salts, sauces, and you start just, you know, putting all the... What kind of message would you think that would send to your host? You know, that you can put a little bit too much salt sometimes on your meal; that says a little something. You got to be careful of that. But certain additions would indicate that the performance was not good enough, that the delivery was not right, that the task was not accomplished appropriately or properly.

And let me get a little bit more extreme. Let's say you sat on the table in my house, and you put your plate there, and you're ready to eat, and I grabbed

the fork off your plate, swirled the spaghetti, and put it up to your mouth like this. Sure, you wouldn't last five minutes in my house; you probably walk out, say, "What's wrong with these guys?" and not jump. But I'm just helping you, right? Well, there's a time when helping causes people to feel inadequate and speaks volumes about the person that you're helping. And sometimes, we think in terms of the gospel like this. Many people think of the terms in terms of the gospel like this, that we're just helping Jesus out. He dies to secure righteousness for us, but hey, we just got to add a little bit of our sauce, of our spice, of our expertise, of our design, of our sacramental system, of our abilities and our powers and our energies, just so that that righteousness could be just perfected, well, perfected for Christ.

Well, what Paul says, this kind of thinking indicates that you believe that Christ died in vain because all the examples that I've given, and as it relates to the gospel, it all demonstrates the insufficiency of the other. When you seek to help in such a way, you are demonstrating and indicating that there is inability and insufficiency in that help. And in justification, we are told very clearly in the scripture that justification is God's business. He doesn't need our help; He hasn't called for our help, and more than that, you cannot help. You see, the Bible presents our situation as we are actually unable to please God and unable to help. The Bible teaches that we are dead in trespasses and sins and that we are separated from the life of God and that those that are in the flesh cannot please God. The Bible teaches us more than that; it goes on to say that even our righteousness is but filthy rags. That's strong.

In a leper colony, they used to have a communal rag, that is believed, and what would happen is all the lepers would use this one rag to wipe their sores so that it wouldn't be spreading everywhere. It's like sharing a tissue, all the COVID guys, you know, we're all sick, share a tissue or the handkerchief, all right? But the idea is that the spread would be contained by this, you know, communal rag, as it were, and the lepers would use this rag. That is what some people believe is meant by filthy rags. Some even believe that it's the rags used in a menstrual cloth and the menstrual cycle, that cloth. And this is how strong the Bible is about our own righteousness. Isaiah says, "All we are all as an unclean thing." That's our start; we're unclean. And he says, "All our righteousnesses are as but filthy rags," meaning everything that proceeds from the unclean thing is contaminated, just like the man who's the garbage collector who goes out and does the garbage run, and all of a sudden, he comes home to his wife and says, "Let me make you a sandwich," and he hasn't washed his hands, and he goes and he makes his wife a sandwich, and he offers it to his... Is that sandwich now clean or unclean? It is unclean; it is unclean by reason of the hands from which it proceeded from.

And so, what God is saying is, we are unclean; man is unclean; man is dead in trespasses and sin, and every attempt to do righteousness, every attempt to do good, every attempt to do something to please God is counted by God as a filthy rag. In other words, it's an offense to God. Whoa. So what's the remedy? Wash yourself, make clean. How? In the blood of Jesus Christ. Come to Him for righteousness; come to Him for holiness. And so, justification in the scripture is undoubtedly God's business. A Bible teaches us that He sent His Son to die for our sins, that He might forgive us, and that He might credit to us righteousness. And God simply says to us, just rest in that, believe in that, cease from your own works, cease from trying to make yourself acceptable in the sight of God, and realize that you are not accepted by God apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and receive it as a gift from Him.

But we say, "No, thank you. Yes, but there's more than that, surely. Surely my performance counts." God says, "Don't insult Me. It is I who justify; it is I who declares righteous; it is I who provided the righteousness in Christ; it is I who made the plan of redemption to save helpless sinners." And so, the Bible says that God does not... Jesus said that He doesn't call the righteous, but He calls sinners to repentance for that very fact. God says, "Do you think My Son died in vain?" In fact, in Romans Chapter 8, He goes on to say, "For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, condemned sin in the flesh." Isn't it... Is that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit? Here what He's saying. But nothing wrong with the law, but it could not produce righteousness for us because there's something wrong with us. But God sent His Son to deal with that whole problem so that we might have the righteousness of the law fulfilled in us. This is God's mercy; this is God's grace. And He says, "Don't say that My Son died in vain."

But you say, you're probably thinking this at the moment, nobody actually says that, Josh. Nobody says Jesus died for nothing. Exactly, that's right; nobody does say Jesus died for nothing. That's the problem; that's the subtlety. You see, many believe that the death of Jesus wasn't for our righteousness; it was for our example, but He did not die to make us righteous in God's sight. Other people would say, "Yes, I believe the death of Jesus Christ was for righteousness, it was for our salvation, it was for our forgiveness, was for our redemption," but they still go about trying to establish their own righteousness before God and have not yet submitted themselves to the righteousness of Christ. And the way you can determine that is by simply asking a couple of questions to that person, which you might want to ask yourself this morning. If I was to ask you this morning, how would you instruct someone to get to heaven? How would you teach someone how they may be accepted in the sight of God? How would you

tell someone how might they be saved? If someone came to you today and said, "You, I'd like to be saved. I'd like to be made right with God. I'd like to be in right relationship to God. I know that I'm not in a relationship to God," what would you tell them?

For many people, they will give them a five-step program, like a rehabilitation center, that you say you're sorry, you go get baptized, you attend church, you take the sacraments, you go through your whole system through life, and read your Bible, and then hopefully one day, in the final analysis, God will gather up all the things that you have done, and yes, He will see your belief in Jesus, and then He will say, "Okay, yep, you're good, come on, come on into My kingdom." And although they may not say that Christ died for nothing, what Paul simply saying is, by believing that, you are saying Christ died for nothing.

You see, no one, not the Judaizers, not the people at Antioch, not even Peter himself was saying Christ died in vain, but Paul is saying this is the logical conclusion. If you believe that righteousness might be established by any other means, any other grounds but the grounds of the blood of Jesus Christ, then you are simply saying, forget the cross of Jesus Christ; it means nothing.

But man's corruption is subtle; his hunger for glory runs deep. So he comes up with all sophisticated arguments so as to just include himself in there, just a little bit, just 1% in my salvation, 1% I'm accepted before God because of me, just one half a percent, a fraction. And this is man's pride; this is man's desire for glory. And God says, "I won't be insulted. I will not share My glory with anyone else." He goes as far as to say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." There is no boasting in the presence of God. There is not one iota, not one small action, deed, thought, anything that you can present to God for acceptance before Him. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

You see, if you seek for works plus grace kind of salvation, what you have basically done is made grace no more grace. Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work." What Paul is simply saying in this matter of justification, in this matter of salvation, you cannot hold both. And therefore, at the beginning of this text, he says these words, "I do not set aside the grace of God." The word "set aside" means to reject, to despise, to set it aside, to count it and nullify it, to make it as if it is nothing. He says, "I don't do that to the grace of God. I will not do that to the grace of God, and neither should anyone do that to the grace of God. I don't nullify it." And what he's simply saying is, you have

a choice: either you reject God's grace, or you receive God's grace. And by rejecting God's grace, you are trusting in your own obedience to the law for acceptance before God. Or, he says, by accepting works for salvation, you are rejecting the grace of God. And what he's saying is, you cannot have both. And he so much elaborates on this in verse number 16 of this text, as "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

I hope the message is clear: there is no way that we will stand accepted before God by our own righteousness. Now, I hope you see the necessity then for the Reformation. I hope you see the need for the fight against other Gospels. I hope by this message you start to realize that this is just not a matter of our postmodern sentiments, "This is your truth, and this is my truth." This is about the truth of God lying dead in the streets. Paul is not allowing for this kind of "you can have it your way, I can have it my way, and we'll both be fine in the end day," or "all roads lead to heaven." He's not teaching that here, is he? He's saying you've got two options: you either set aside the grace of God and say that Christ died for nothing, or you submit yourself to the grace of God as the sufficient righteousness for a sinner's justification in acceptance before God. There's no other way to have it.

And you say, "Well, I believe the cross of Jesus Christ. I believe in grace." But let me ask you this question this morning: what do you believe about it? Do you really believe that Jesus paid it all? Do you really believe that our righteousness does not contribute in one bit to our salvation? Do you really believe that He alone justifies? Because if the truth be known, 99% or most of the religions that do not hold to the authority of Scripture believe that it is by faith plus works. This is the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church; this is the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church; this is the doctrines of the Mormons; it is the doctrine of the Jehovah Witnesses; this is the doctrine of every denomination outside of the evangelical world that does not hold to the truth of the gospel by faith alone in Jesus Christ. This is what is believed, and in some sophisticated way, they construct their whole religion so as that it is not that the sufficiency of Christ saves us, but that it is Christ plus what we do to enter the kingdom of heaven.

And so sophisticatedly, they redefine grace that, yes, it's all of grace, but what do you mean by grace? And they go on to say, "I'll tell you what I mean by grace: you receive grace in baptism, you receive grace in the sacraments, you receive grace in confirmation, you receive grace in marriage, you receive grace in the last rites, and therefore, in the final analysis, if you have been obedience, and yes, if you have believed in Jesus, then hopefully one day, through a bit of purgatory fire, you may be able to enter the kingdom of

heaven." But we cannot tell you for sure that you're going to enter there because they do not believe that Christ's righteousness is sufficient. There is no assurance of faith. Why? Because what Jesus did, yes, is good enough, but you got to carry up; you got to move forward; you got to pick up the slack; you got to finish what He started. It won't put it in those terms, but the sum and substance of their faith believes that, and therefore, the undermining of the sufficiency of the cross of Christ happens. What does Paul say to that? Then Christ died in vain.

We have to beware of despising the grace of God, the One who loved us, gave Himself for us, the One with whom we have been crucified, the One who justifies. We have to be careful not to despise the grace of God in the gospel, and we can do that in many subtle ways. There are many people today, maybe you are one of these people here today, that think to yourselves in a self-pity way that Christ can't save someone like me. You know, if I really confess my sin to God, and He really understood what I had done wrong, then surely there's no salvation for me. Surely there's not enough power in the cross of Jesus Christ to forgive me. And in the subtle, comfortable frame of self-pity, what they simply do is raise the fist at God and said, "Christ died in vain." A subtle form of saying, "The blood of Jesus Christ has power to cleanse sin, but not all sin. Yes, He can declare righteous, but not all people that believe in His name." There are some like me, and in a kind of self-pity and in a place of sorrow, they run their course to the pits of hell by denying the blessed, glorious gospel of Jesus that will save all who come to Him and give righteousness to all.

Some do it by self-dependence. You know, everyone needs to take care of themselves, they say. "Look, I'll do enough good, and I'll be right. Yep, God, the whole God thing's good. He died, yes, I get it, yep, but I'll be right." Some do it in the sense of self-preservation. "Yes, He forgives, yes, it's all of grace, but now that He's brought me to this point, now it's up to me. I've got to maintain my righteousness; I've got to maintain my acceptability before God." And their lives is one of uncertainty, one of sorrow, one of condemnation. You see, the Bible teaches us that as the hymn writer writes as well, he says, "His blood can make the foulest clean; His blood availed for me." So no matter how deep your sin is, no matter how wicked your sin is, one drop of the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all unrighteousness and put you righteous in God's sight. Do you believe that?

Now, the problem is that there are ways in which Christians also despise the grace of God, not to this TRANSCRIPT:

Galatians Chapter Number 2, verse 11 through to verse number 21. Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat

with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy. But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? We who are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also were found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which 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 set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

Let us pray. Father, I ask that You would open our eyes that we might behold wondrous things out of Your law. Speak, O Lord, to us, we pray. Teach us, we pray. Arrest our hearts by the truth of Your word, and Father, bring us to the place of humility that we might readily receive Your word and that we might be exalted to rejoice with You because of You. We ask this in Jesus' name, Amen.

We come to verse number 21 of this chapter, which is the last verse of this chapter in Galatians chapter number 2, and verse 21 summarizes and concludes the entire section that spans from verse number 11 down to verse 20-21. And in this section, verse 11 through to verse number 21, particularly from verse 14 onward, what we have here is Paul's unfolding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone in Jesus Christ and those implications that result because of it. Implications being the unity of God's people because all of God's people are accepted through the righteousness of Jesus Christ and therefore accepted by God, should be received by one another. And also, from verse 19 and onward, he explains that this doctrine of justification not only leads us to the implications of Christian unity but also to holiness of life. And all this is done within the context of this apostolic confrontation between Paul and Peter there at Antioch. And Paul has been demonstrating to the churches of Galatia, in recounting this situation that happened at Antioch, he's been demonstrating the relationship between union with Christ and justification, and he's been proving that dying to the law does not mean that one cannot live unto God. He's also been demonstrating that faith in Jesus Christ, apart from the law, doesn't

make Christ there the minister of sin. In fact, quite contrary to that, just because we are saved by faith alone, by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, that doesn't mean Christ is the minister of sin. Christ is not the minister of sin; in fact, He is the very power that leads His people to holiness and righteousness of life. He also has been demonstrating that union with Christ, therefore, is that true power for holiness of life. Our death with Christ, our resurrection with Christ in our conversion, is the very, if I could say, the very safeguard of our holiness. That new covenant promises come through that very truth. And so, Paul's whole argument in this passage can be summed up in three words: simply this, Christ is sufficient. He is sufficient as the sinner's justification, as the sinner's forgiveness and righteousness, and therefore, they are to find their sin is not to find righteousness in anywhere else but in Christ alone. And not only is it Christ sufficient as a sinner's righteousness but also as the believer's power in sanctification, that He lives in us, that by faith in Him, He uniting us to Himself, we will bear fruit unto God as a result of our union with Him. And Paul's whole argument is to demonstrate that Christ is sufficient, Christ is complete, His gospel is all that the sinner needs. This is also said in 1st Corinthians 1:30-31 by Paul also himself. He says, "But of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification and redemption; that, as it is written, 'He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.'" Paul lifts up Christ as everything to us: our righteousness and our sanctification, our wisdom, and everything that we need is found in Him. And verse 21 is summarizing this entire section, and verse 21 basically talks about the sufficiency of Jesus Christ as our Savior and for righteousness. The sufficiency of Christ in the gospel is said in verse number 21, and the way to understand this passage is to focus your attention upon the middle part of that text because in verse 21, "I do not set aside the grace of God," and this is the part you need to focus on, "for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." And what Paul is saying here is presenting a hypothetical; he's saying, "If this is true, if righteousness, if our justification, if our acceptability before God can be established by obedience to the law of God, then this would logically follow: Christ died in vain." And the issue at Antioch spoke specifically to this as well. If you remember, as we just read this morning, that the gospel was at stake at Antioch. Peter's hypocrisy in verse number 14 led to him, as it were, walking not straightforward or not according to the truth of the gospel. Peter was walking in a way that was out of step with the truth of the gospel. Peter's isolation from the Gentile believers made the Gentile believers feel, or communicated to all the believers there, that you need more than Christ to be accepted by God. Now, we know this was hypocrisy. Peter himself did not believe this, but Paul's whole argument is to say, "Peter, if you are going to behave in a way that the Gentiles do not belong to the people of God because they are Gentiles and not under the law as the Jews are, then you are essentially saying by your life that accept-

ability before God, righteousness before God, comes through the law." Now, Peter preached the opposite to that, but his life and his testimony at that very moment in Antioch spoke the opposite to that. And Paul's response to Peter's hypocrisy was simply this: that all of us are sinners, both Jew and Gentiles, and that we need to repent and believe in Jesus so that we might be received by God in Christ. In other words, what he's saying is, it's not by the works of the law that a man is just before God; it is not by what a man does or doesn't do necessarily that makes him accepted before God; it is solely upon the work of Jesus Christ. "If we seek to be justified by Christ," is what he says, "that we're justified by faith in Jesus Christ, not by the works of the law." And so, Peter responds to this situation by laying down the truth of justification by faith, and then Paul concludes simply this: that God's people are not the ones that live as Jews. Remember what he says here, "If you, being a Jew, live as a Gentile, compel Gentiles to live as Jews," right? He's challenging Peter's whole behavior. And what he's saying is, God's people are not to be known by whether or not they are Judaizers, whether or not they're under the Old Covenant, whether or not they are keeping the Mosaic law. No, what Paul is simply saying is that God's people are those that have faith in Jesus Christ. These are the true people of God. These are the ones that are accepted before God as His own.

But what if Paul was wrong? What if Paul got this all muddled up? What if the law was somewhat necessary for our justification or acceptance before God? What if the Judaizers were right, and you know that it was not enough just to have faith in Jesus Christ; you need faith in Jesus Christ plus circumcision, or plus baptism, or plus keeping the law of Moses, or plus this, and then God will truly accept you? Or maybe, as you navigate your way through this, God will weigh up your good works and bad works on the final day, and you'll see whether or not you'll get it. What if Paul was wrong? What if verse 21b is true, "righteousness coming through the law"? Well, Paul gives an answer to that. Paul is basically saying, "If I'm wrong, if justification by faith alone is wrong, if a person's acceptance before God is by anything else than the righteousness of Jesus Christ, this is the consequence of that belief: Christ died in vain."

That's a bold conclusion. In fact, it's a very confronting conclusion, isn't it? Paul has just escalated this whole thing. This is not a matter of preference. This is not a matter of, "This is what you believe, this is what I believe, and it's inconsequential." You know, like, "That's fine." Paul raises the stakes here to the point to demonstrate that if you believe that your acceptance before God has anything to do with your own righteousness and your own works and law, then Christ died for nothing. That's high treason. That's blasphemy to the highest degree, to say that Christ died for nothing, to say that Christ died in vain is high treason and blasphemy against God Himself. And we would all agree with that. But what Paul is saying is, if

self-justification is possible by Old Covenant signs, feast law-keeping, then Christ died without cause; He died needlessly, He died aimlessly, He died without purpose. If that were true, love, what one man said, he said this: "If people can make themselves good by doing what is called their duty, then the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and the ascension of Jesus constitute the greatest mistake that was ever made in the universe. If a man can be really good, can make himself all that God can possibly desire him to be of his own motion and will, and by the resources of his own invention and energy, then the mediation of Christ Jesus was a great and generous expenditure of pain and life and sorrow, and an expenditure that ended in nothing." That's pretty serious. What Paul is saying here is extremely serious.

Think about the babe born in a manger of the Virgin Mary in Bethlehem. Think about the Son of God coming and living among men, working by the sweat of His brow as a carpenter, laboring, God incarnate, tired, tempted, tried, tested, and rejected, sent to an old rugged cross to die for our sins. Think about all that the Son of God went through in the accomplishment of our redemption. Paul says that the sum and total of all that suffering and pain, the incarnation, the death, the burial, the resurrection, the life of Jesus, all of it, all of it, you might as well throw it in the rubbish tin. It's worth nothing. It's without any value. It's without any cause. It's without any effect. It's vain. It's empty if this hypothetical statement is true, that I may obtain a righteousness for myself by the law apart from Jesus Christ. Then forget about it. God wasted His time, sent His Son to die for nothing, and we've got to now work out what Jesus came to do anyway.

But you might think, "Well, no, no, no, look, it's not about that. It's just about helping Jesus out, right? So He does His part, I do my part. Like, yes, He died for our sins, but then what ends up happening is I contribute all the goodness that I can contribute to my own righteousness, and then whatever's lacking, Jesus kind of fills in the gap, and therefore we have a combined righteousness." Well, there are times when helping becomes an insult, and I can tell you this is one of those occasions. If you believe that there's a time when helping becomes an insult because it insults a person's autonomy, it insults a person's ability, and it insults a person's dignity. You say, "How so?" Think about the micromanager. He's always helping, helping by informing every decision, every move, checking every detail, even completing tasks for the employee. We look at that micromanager, and we say, "You're not actually helping. You're insulting your employee. You are showing control and distrust. You are essentially saying that they are unable to carry out the tasks you have given them to do."

What about the well-intentioned parent who treats their adult child as if they're still in diapers, you know, incompetent of life's most basic deci-

sions? You know, many kids obviously don't understand their handicaps, and therefore parents do definitely need to continue to speak into their life, but we're talking about the well-intentioned, overbearing parent that doesn't see their children growing. Well, how does it make the child feel? Inadequate, incompetent, makes the child feel as if they are useless and good for nothing.

Let me give a more extreme example. Well, the first one may not be that extreme, but let's say you came over to my house for dinner, and we put on a nice spread. My wife has worked and laboriously gone ahead to deliver this beautiful meal, put it out on the table before you, and you pull out from under the table your own caddy, salts, sauces, and you start just, you know, putting all the... What kind of message would you think that would send to your host? You know, that you can put a little bit too much salt sometimes on your meal. That says a little something. You got to be careful of that. But certain additions would indicate that the performance was not good enough, that the delivery was not right, that the task was not accomplished appropriately or properly.

And let me get a little bit more extreme. Let's say you sat on the table in my house, and you put your plate there, and you're ready to eat, and I grabbed the fork off your plate, swirled the spaghetti, and put it up to your mouth like this. Sure, you wouldn't last five minutes in my house. You probably would walk out and say, "What's wrong with these guys?" and not jump. But I'm just helping you, right? Well, there's a time when helping causes people to feel inadequate and speaks volumes about the person that you're helping. And sometimes, we think in terms of the gospel like this. Many people think of the terms in terms of the gospel like this, that we're just helping Jesus out. He dies to secure righteousness for us, but hey, we just got to add a little bit of our sauce, of our spice, of our expertise, of our design, of our sacramental system, of our abilities and our powers and our energies, just so that that righteousness could be just perfected. Well, perfected for Christ. Well, what Paul says, this kind of thinking indicates that you believe that Christ died in vain because all the examples that I've given, and as it relates to the gospel, it all demonstrates the insufficiency of the other. When you seek to help in such a way, you are demonstrating and indicating that there is inability and insufficiency in that help. And in justification, we are told very clearly in the scripture that justification is God's business. He doesn't need our help. He hasn't called for our help, and more than that, you cannot help.

You see, the Bible presents our situation as we are actually unable to please God and unable to help. The Bible teaches that we are dead in trespasses and sins and that we are separated from the life of God, and that those that are in the flesh cannot please God. The Bible teaches us more than

that. It goes on to say that even our righteousness is but filthy rags. That's strong. In a leper colony, they used to have a communal rag, that is believed, and what would happen is all the lepers would use this one rag to wipe their sores, so this that it wouldn't be spreading everywhere. It's like sharing a tissue, all the COVID guys, you know, we're all sick, share a tissue or the handkerchief, all right? But the idea is that the spread would be contained by this, you know, communal rag, as it were, and the lepers would use this rag. That is what some people believe is meant by filthy rags. Some even believe that it's the rags used in a menstrual cloth and the menstrual cycle, that cloth. And this is how strong the Bible is about our own righteousness. Isaiah says, "All we are all as an unclean thing." That's our word. We start unclean, and he says, "All our righteousnesses are as but filthy rags," meaning everything that proceeds from the unclean thing is contaminated. Just like the man who's the garbage collector, who goes out and does the garbage run, and all of a sudden, he comes home to his wife and says, "Let me make you a sandwich," and he hasn't washed his hands, and he goes and he makes his wife a sandwich, and he offers it to his... Is that sandwich now clean or unclean? It is unclean. It is unclean by reason of the hands from which it proceeded from. And so, what God is saying is, we are unclean. Man is unclean. Man is dead in trespasses and sin, and every attempt to do righteousness, every attempt to do good, every attempt to do something to please God is counted by God as a filthy rag. In other words, it's an offense to God. Whoa. So, what's the remedy? Wash yourself, make clean. How? In the blood of Jesus Christ. Come to Him for righteousness. Come to Him for holiness.

And so, justification, in the scripture, is undoubtedly God's business. A Bible teaches us that He sent His Son to die for our sins, that He might forgive us, and that He might credit to us righteousness. And God simply says to us, "Just rest in that. Believe in that. Cease from your own works. Cease from trying to make yourself acceptable in the sight of God, and realize that you are not accepted by God apart from the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and receive it as a gift from Him." But we say, "No, thank you. Yes, but there's more than that, surely. Surely my performance counts." God says, "Don't insult Me. It is I who justify. It is I who declares righteous. It is I who provided the righteousness in Christ. It is I who made the plan of redemption to save helpless sinners." And so, the Bible says that God does not... Jesus said that He doesn't call the righteous, but He calls sinners to repentance for that very fact. God says, "Do you think My Son died in vain?" In fact, in Romans chapter 8, He goes on to say, "For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, condemned sin in the flesh, that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh but after the spirit." Here what He's saying. But nothing wrong with the law, but it could not produce righteousness for us because there's

something wrong with us. But God sent His Son to deal with that whole problem so that we might have the righteousness of the law fulfilled in us. This is God's mercy. This is God's grace. And He says, "Don't say that My Son died in vain."

But you say, "You're probably thinking this at the moment. Nobody actually says that, Josh. Nobody says Jesus died for nothing." Exactly. That's right. Nobody does say Jesus died for nothing. That's the problem. That's the subtlety. You see, many believe that the death of Jesus wasn't for our righteousness; it was for our example, a moral example, but He did not die to make us righteous in God's sight. Other people would say, "Yes, I believe the death of Jesus Christ was for righteousness, it was for our salvation, it was for our forgiveness, was for our redemption," but they still go about trying to establish their own righteousness before God and have not yet submitted themselves to the righteousness of Christ. And the way you can determine that is by simply asking a couple of questions to that person, which you might want to ask yourself this morning. If I was to ask you this morning, how would you instruct someone to get to heaven? How would you teach someone how they may be accepted in the sight of God? How would you tell someone how might they be saved? If someone came to you today and said, "I'd like to be saved. I'd like to be made right with God. I'd like to be in right relationship to God. I know that I'm not in a relationship to God," what would you tell them?

For many people, they will give them a five-step program, like a rehabilitation center, that you say you're sorry, you go get baptized, you attend church, you take the sacraments, you go through your whole system through life, and read your Bible, and then hopefully one day, in the final analysis, God will gather up all the things that you have done, and yes, He will see your belief in Jesus, and then He will say, "Okay, yep, you're good. Come on, come on into My kingdom." And although they may not say that Christ died for nothing, what Paul is simply saying is, by believing that, you are saying Christ died for nothing.

You see, no one, not the Judaizers, not the people at Antioch, not even Peter himself, was saying Christ died in vain, but Paul is saying this is the logical conclusion if you believe that righteousness might be established by any other means, any other grounds but the grounds of the blood of Jesus Christ. Then you are simply saying, "Forget the cross of Jesus Christ. It means nothing."

But man's corruption is subtle; his hunger for glory runs deep. So he comes up with all sophisticated arguments so as to just include himself in there, just a little bit, just 1% in my salvation, 1% I'm accepted before God because of me, just one half a percent, a fraction. And this is man's pride;

this is man's desire for glory. And God says, "I won't be insulted. I will not share My glory with anyone else." He goes as far as to say, "For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast." There is no boasting in the presence of God. There is not one iota, not one small action, deed, thought, anything that you can present to God for acceptance before Him. "Nothing in my hands I bring, simply to the cross I cling."

You see, if you seek for works plus grace kind of salvation, what you have basically done is made grace no more grace. Romans 11:6 says, "And if by grace, then it is no longer of works; otherwise grace is no longer grace. But if it is of works, it is no longer grace; otherwise work is no longer work." What Paul is simply saying in this matter of justification, in this matter of salvation, you cannot hold both. And therefore, at the beginning of this text, he says these words, "I do not set aside the grace of God." The word "set aside" means to reject, to despise, to set it aside, to count it and nullify it, to make it as if it is nothing. He says, "I don't do that to the grace of God. I will not do that to the grace of God, and neither should anyone do that to the grace of God." I don't nullify it. And what he's simply saying is, you have a choice: either you reject God's grace, or you receive God's grace. And by rejecting God's grace, you are trusting in your own obedience to the law for acceptance before God. Or, he says, by accepting works for salvation, you are rejecting the grace of God. And what he's saying is, you cannot have both. And he so much elaborates on this in verse number 16 of this text, as "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

I hope the message is clear: there is no way that we will stand accepted before God by our own righteousness. Now, I hope you see the necessity then for the Reformation. I hope you see the need for the fight against other Gospels. I hope by this message you start to realize that this is just not a matter of our postmodern sentiments, "This is your truth, and this is my truth." This is about the truth of God lying dead in the streets. Paul is not allowing for this kind of "you can have it your way, I can have it my way, and we'll both be fine in the end day," or "all roads lead to heaven." He's not teaching that here, is he? He's saying you've got two options: you either set aside the grace of God and say that Christ died for nothing, or you submit yourself to the grace of God as the sufficient righteousness for a sinner's justification in acceptance before God. There's no other way to have it.

And you say, "Well, I believe the cross of Jesus Christ. I believe in grace." But let me ask you this question this morning: What do you believe about it? Do you really believe that Jesus paid it all? Do you really believe that

our righteousness does not contribute in one bit to our salvation? Do you really believe that He alone justifies? Because if the truth be known, 99% or most of the religions that do not hold to the authority of Scripture believe that it is by faith plus works. This is the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church. This is the doctrine of the Eastern Orthodox Church. This is the doctrine of the Mormons. It is the doctrine of the Jehovah Witnesses. This is the doctrine of every denomination outside of the evangelical world that does not hold to the truth of the gospel by faith alone in Jesus Christ. This is what is believed, and in some sophisticated way, they construct their whole religion so as that it is not that the sufficiency of Christ saves us, but that it is Christ plus what we do to enter the kingdom of heaven.

And so sophisticatedly, they redefine grace that, yes, it's all of grace, but what do you mean by grace? And they go on to say, "I'll tell you what I mean by grace. You receive grace in baptism. You receive grace in the sacraments. You receive grace in confirmation. You receive grace in marriage. You receive grace in the last rites. And therefore, in the final analysis, if you have been obedient, and yes, if you have believed in Jesus, then hopefully one day, through a bit of purgatory fire, you may be able to enter the kingdom of heaven." But we cannot tell you for sure that you're going to enter there because they do not believe that Christ's righteousness is sufficient. There is no assurance of faith. Why? Because what Jesus did, yes, is good enough, but you got to carry up. You got to move forward. You got to pick up the slack. You got to finish what He started. It won't put it in those terms, but the sum and substance of their faith believes that, and therefore, the undermining of the sufficiency of the cross of Christ happens.

What does Paul say to that? Then Christ died in vain. We have to beware of despising the grace of God, the One who loved us, gave Himself for us, the One with whom we have been crucified, the One who justifies. We have to be careful not to despise the grace of God in the gospel, and we can do that in many subtle ways. There are many people today, maybe you are one of these people here today, that think to yourselves in a self-pity way that Christ can't save someone like me. You know, if I really confess my sin to God, and He really understood what I had done wrong, then surely there's no salvation for me. Surely there's not enough power in the cross of Jesus Christ to forgive me. And in the subtle, comfortable frame of self-pity, what they simply do is raise the fist at God and said, "Christ died in vain." A subtle form of saying, "The blood of Jesus Christ has power to cleanse sin, but not all sin. Yes, He can declare righteous, but not all people that believe in His name." There are some like me, and in a kind of self-pity and in a place of sorrow, they run their course to the pits of hell by denying the blessed, glorious gospel of Jesus that will save all who come to Him and give righteousness to all.

Some do it by self-dependence. You know, everyone needs to take care of themselves, they say. "Look, I'll do enough good, and I'll be right. Yep, God, the whole God thing's good. He died, yes, I get it, yep, but I'll be right." Some do it in the sense of self-preservation. "Yes, He forgives. Yes, it's all of grace, but now that He's brought me to this point, now it's up to me. I've got to maintain my righteousness. I've got to maintain my acceptability before God." And their lives is one of uncertainty, one of sorrow, one of condemnation.

You see, the Bible teaches us that as the hymn writer writes as well, he says, "His blood can make the foulest clean. His blood availed for me." So no matter how deep your sin is, no matter how wicked your sin is, one drop of the blood of Jesus Christ will cleanse you from all unrighteousness and put you righteous in God's sight. Do you believe that?

Now, the problem is that there are ways in which Christians also despise the grace of God, not to this extent, but to an extent nonetheless. And we often do that in our self-condemnation. We've robbed ourselves of the efficacy of the cross upon the conscience. Jesus Christ died, and He's cleansed our conscience because He says, "Your sins and iniquities I will remember no more." And you've confessed your sins, and He's faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness. Yet you live your life lifting up those sins before your face, thinking, "Yeah, nah, nah, nah," and by doing so, you despise the glory of the grace of God in Jesus Christ because that very gospel is meant to shape our entire attitude to the way we live, that we are forgiven, that we are righteous. And Christians so often live as though God is not for them, as if He's against them. This is the denial of the doctrine of justification applied to us. And as Christians, we cannot experience that grace in our lives day to day because we do not live in light of that righteousness that God has imputed to us through His Son by mercy and grace alone.

And therefore, as Christians or those who profess Jesus, we must be careful, very careful, because the Bible teaches us in Hebrews chapter 3, verses 12 to 13, "Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; but exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." And it's referring to that case of the children of Israel in the wilderness that were delivered out of Egypt, passed through the Red Sea, went on with the provision of God, and saw the blessings of God upon their lives, but they came to Canaan and drew back at the sight of the Giants. An evil heart of unbelief gripped these people that professed God's salvation, and they drew back and perished in the wilderness. And Paul says, "Just because you sit in a church week after week, week after week, and the Word of God washes over you, it does not mean that you are finally safe."

Let me ask you, who are you trusting in this very moment for your salvation? But there's Giants in the land. Did God say, "That's the land I gave you"? Then go and get it by faith. Trust in the blood of Jesus Christ that He will bring you safely home. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and keep on believing on Jesus, for He alone can save.

We are told in Scripture to hold fast the confession of our faith because there are many people that start with the right understanding on this journey, that taste of things regarding salvation, but have not yet fully understood and experienced salvation and known the salvation of God. And to those ones, there is a danger of falling away. And therefore, we must go on, trust in the precious blood of Jesus Christ, and we should never move from the gospel. Say this to yourselves, remind yourself of this: "I need no other argument," as the hymn writer says, "I need no other plea. It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me. It is enough that Jesus died, and that He died for me."

"For I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain." Are you trusting Jesus alone for your salvation this morning? Let us pray.