

Title: The Danger of Being Raised “Right”
Text: Galatians 2:15-21
Theme: Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone
Series: Galatians #2
Prop Stmtnt: Being raised right is a curse if I trust in that instead of Christ.

Read Text:

I recently told one of our students that I had been a youth pastor once. He looked a bit shocked, you know the look that kids give you when you tell them that you haven't always been this old, but you were actually young at one time. But, it is true. I was a youth pastor and one of the benefits of that, is that I tend to think in terms of how would a student hear this text? I remember preaching through passages like Galatians and thinking that when I get to heaven I'm going to talk with Paul and ask him, “did you have to talk so much about circumcision?” Of course, he would probably say that he was writing what the Spirit directed him to write, and then I couldn't argue with that. But, since circumcision was such an important issue and personal issue for the Jews, it was rightfully used as a means of summarizing how a Jew viewed and related to the OT law (or the law of Moses).

In order to understand this issue, we need to make sure that we define terms, and get a grasp on the entire picture. Even in the early church there was a spectrum of beliefs about how a Christian was supposed to related to the law of Moses.

Last week I mentioned but did not elaborate on the fact that one of the enemies of the gospel is cheap grace. Cheap grace is the position that says, “*Forgiveness means that I am free to sin without consequences.*” I am free from the law is interpreted as I am free from any restriction or moral standard. Romans 6.1 and 16 clearly blow that up. The gospel makes us free in Christ, but not free from Christ. We are free now to obey God, not free to sin. Living in sin puts us right back into bondage and if we live in sin, while we claim to be a believer, then we ought to question whether or not we really understand what it means to repent of our sin and follow Christ. But, here's what happens. People who embrace cheap grace tend to accuse believers who call one another to live consistently of being legalists. Beloved, holding to a standard that God has created for Christians is not being a legalist. Being a Christian means that we follow Christ. We follow. He leads. He tells us what we are to think, not think, do and not do. Following his lead and expecting one another to do the same is not being a legalist.

Go back to the beginning of chapter 2. Paul goes to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus (an uncircumcised Gentile) and tells the leadership there, James (the Lord's brother – see 1.19, who appeared to be the lead pastor of the church in Jerusalem), Peter and John what he believes about the gospel and his ministry to go to Gentiles with the gospel, but he would start by attempting to reach the Jews. Even by then, the early church had been infiltrated by some “false brothers” (4) who were opposed to Paul and what he was doing. So, Paul's ministry was already controversial, but he was approved and endorsed by the “pillars” of the church to do it.

Now we get to verses 11-14. Paul has an understanding with Peter (and James and John), but Peter shies away from living out the position and practice they agreed to. When Peter shied away from eating with Gentiles, even though he had previously done so, he was separating himself from brothers and sisters which set an example that other Jews followed that was dividing the church. Peter's practice was endorsing a position that was not consistent with the gospel. Peter was a believer, but what he was doing was not consistent with the gospel and when that happens it creates confusion. Read v.14.

Now, look carefully at the end of v.14. The translators included quotation marks because Paul clearly said this to Peter. Quotation marks were not included in ancient Greek writing. The translators inserted them to help us however, I think that verses 15-21 were also what Paul said to Peter. In verses 15-21, Paul is clearly defining the gospel not because Peter doesn't know the gospel, but because Peter, others and now the churches in Galatia are not living consistently with the gospel. They know it, but are living out of order to it. Even though you know the gospel and you believe the gospel, when you live out of order to the gospel, it creates confusion for others and unless there is a course correction, the gospel will be lost. Up until this point in the letter Paul has referred to the gospel and talked about the urgency of protecting it, but now he defines it.

I. Here's what we know about the gospel (15-16b)

A. In spite of our religious upbringing (15)

This subpoint leads to the next subpoint (A leads to B) because verse 15 is a set-up for verse 16. Paul is telling Peter that if anyone would have an inside track on justification, if anyone would have an inherent right, a birthright claim on justification, it would be us Jews. But, we know better than that! And this is why the gospel is so devastating to pride. Coming to faith in Christ means that I let go of my trust in any of my own goodness. But this is the danger of being raised "right." Let's say that you participated in Bible quizzing and you memorized the entire book of Romans. Or, let's say that you were raised going to Sunday School and VBS and you know all of the stories of the OT and Jesus. Let's say that you learned OT history and you know the dates of the division of the Davidic kingdom, the fall of the north, the fall of the south, the return from exile and can even tell us what minor prophets are pre-exilic, exilic and post-exilic. When someone says, turn in your Bibles to the book of Lamentations or Ezra, you actually know where those are, unlike some sitting around you. It is so easy, so tempting to think that having more information than others, means that you are a tad better. Being raised in the gospel is a gift from God designed to help you see how much you need him, not a vaccination to make you immune from it. But that is the danger. I was home-schooled – so what! I was public-schooled – so what! I was raised in the children's ministry – so what! I was a champion Bible-Quizzer – so what! My dad was a pastor, I was raised on the mission field – so what? I'm a Buckeye fan (now that's ok). Can these be good things? Sure! But they do not count for justification. I want you to see what Paul is doing here. The Galatian believers had allowed men to come in and influence them with bad teaching. They were being taught that if you were going to be a real Christian that you had to be circumcised, keep the dietary laws of the OT, which would eventually lead to not associating with Gentiles...etc.

Paul is blowing it up. If the ceremonial law, sacrificial law (OT) does not count for righteousness, do we now make these as categories for separation? No! The Old Covenant is over.

B. A person is NOT justified by works of the law. (16a)

If you are going to clearly understand what the gospel is, you have to understand what it isn't. (cf. John 14.6) There is nothing that you can do in order to earn the favor of God. A person is NOT justified by obedience to the law. The law that came through Moses (Mt. Sinai) was given to make people realize how much they needed a Savior. The law reveals our need.

When I explain the gospel I often use the argument that Paul presents in the book of Romans. What Paul does in Romans is go into more depth about what he is saying right here. I will often say, that the book of Romans teaches that people who are from an immoral background are under the just and righteous wrath of God. You can just feel the tension. I was preaching the other night to an audience that I had never spoken to before and I said this and paused for a second to let it sink in. There was obvious tension. Then I said, the book of Romans also teaches that people who are from a moral background are under the just and righteous wrath of God. And the book of Romans teaches that people who are from a religious background are under the just and righteous wrath of God.

The Jews were tempted to believe that because they were raised right, that they did not need as much salvation as the Gentiles who were clearly raised as pagans. Do you see how damning that can be? That is why Paul starts out stating the negative. "A person is NOT justified by works of the law." If I think, "Hey I've got issues, but I'm not as bad as that guy" then I am tempted to think that he needs more grace to be saved from his sin than I do. That is not true, because if you carry that out, you are saying that your life has made you a little bit more save-able. And this is where being raised right can be so dangerous. It is so tempting to believe that how I was raised, and what I was taught, and what I did, (in comparison to others) somehow positively contributes to my standing. It doesn't! In fact, if I believe that my upbringing gives me a leg up in the eyes of God, then my upbringing in that sense is damning me. To the degree that I trust in my being raised right instead of trusting Christ, I am not believing the gospel.

C. A person is justified through faith in Jesus Christ. (16b)

Justified means to be counted righteous. Since no one but Jesus is actually righteous, there is no way that we be counted as righteous on our own. All of us are playing with dirty money. One of the landmines for politicians is raising money. If you accept money from the KKK, or from someone who is a drug kingpin, or from broker in human trafficking, you have dirty money. You need resources that come from untainted sources, right? Well, in order for us to have a right standing before God, we need to be forgiven of our sins and we need to have righteousness. But, since we cannot do anything to earn the forgiveness of God, nor do we have any righteousness because all of our "righteousness" is not really righteous, we have no hope in our selves. Being nice doesn't count. Being good doesn't count. Getting baptized as an infant doesn't count. A person is justified through faith in Jesus Christ because ONLY Jesus is righteous. He lived the life you could not live. He lived a life of perfect obedience and he did it, in your place.

Everything that he did in his life pleased the Father. Everything that he did in his death paid the penalty for your sin. So, when you trust in Christ (life and death) you get credit for his death, which pays for your sin and forgives you, and you get credit for his life which means that you are now counted as, considered as, viewed as, treated as, and accepted as righteous because the righteousness of Christ is applied to your account. Faith alone in Christ alone.

II. Here's is what we have done about the gospel. (16c-d)

Paul is continuing to talk to Peter. We all agreed on this.

A. We believed in Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ.

Paul, like a carefully skilled attorney and master of logic and rhetoric is not leaving any holes here. He is saying Peter, we not only know this, but we believed it. You and me, we believed it. We believed in Christ in order to be justified by faith in Christ. We are agreement on this, right?

B. Not by works of the law.

Therefore, it is not by works of the law. The works of the law do not count.

By the way, have you ever believed in Christ?

III. Here are the implications of the gospel. (17-21)

Big idea here: Justification is by faith. Justification drives sanctification. Since Justification is by faith, sanctification is by faith. Obeying the ceremonial law and dietary law did not make you righteous. It counts for nothing for your salvation. The Old Covenant is over. It has been replaced by the New Covenant in Christ. Live in the gospel. Live in the New Covenant. Do not go back to the OT and try to place yourself or anyone else under it as if it will count for something. When you believe in the gospel and you live in the gospel...

A. Some people will accuse you of being a sinner. (17-18)

True legalists are terrified by grace because it threatens their world. Jesus does that. That's the point! If you serve BBQ pork at the church picnic and you were raised as a Jew, can you eat it? Yes, you sure can. But, if you do, someone may accuse you of being a sinner because you are breaking the law. But, the law is no longer in force.

I am old enough to remember when President Carter made 55 the national speed limit. It's probably the primary reason why he lost his re-election in a landslide. Now, let's say that you actually meet one of the rare people in Detroit who pays any attention to speed limits. By the looks of things, they are more like suggestions, right? But, let's say that for years he drove 55 and no faster, but then the law was changed and it is now up to 70 and in some places up north 75. But, it doesn't feel right to him and he still drives 55 and he is riding with you one day and you are driving 70 in a 70 zone, he feels as if you are wrong, but you are not. Paul is saying that trusting in Christ does not make me a sinner. Following Christ and not obeying the law that is no

longer in force, does not make me more sinful. Would that make any sense? If following Christ makes me more of a sinner, then Christ would be guilty of serving sin and I would be rebuilding a Pharisaical life that I tore down when I trusted Christ. And then Paul begins to unpack one of the most beautiful doctrines in the Bible – the believer’s union with Christ.

B. You die to works-driven righteousness by dying with Christ. (19a, 20a)

Look at the beginning of v.19 and then the beginning of v.20. The law made me aware of the fact that I could not please God. I tried. I thought that because I kept the law better than others, that I was better than others, until I realized what the purpose of the law was. I finally realize that I could not perfectly keep the law. I died to my efforts to earn the favor of God through my works. When I trust in Christ, I was given credit for his death. In his death, I died. I died to my old life. I am (present) crucified with Christ. I am unresponsive to the idea that I can earn approval from God through my efforts. Therefore, my identify is IN CHRIST. My identity is not in what I do. My identity is not being a pastor. My identity is Christ. Mom’s your identity is not in being a mom and when your children grow up and leave the house, your life is now over. Your identity is not in the children that you bore, but in Christ. Your identity is not in your job. If your company is bought out, or downsizes, or you retire, you are not lost. If you are a follower of Christ, your identity is Christ because...

C. You live to God because Christ lives in you. (19b, 20b) (and that is enough!)

You are unresponsive to seeking God’s approval through your achievements, but you are totally alive, totally responsive, totally alive, totally energized by Christ who lives in you. You are at rest in Christ because you are in Christ and now your life is a life of resting in his finished work on the cross and his ongoing ministry of standing before the Father on your behalf.

D. You live by faith in Jesus (20c-d)

My salvation is rooted in grace-driven faith in Christ. My sanctification is from faith-driven obedience to Christ. As a follower of Christ I follow Christ. I seek to follow his commands. I don’t follow his commands to earn the favor of God or to earn his love. I already have that. I follow his commands because I believe in Him. I have faith in Him. I believe that he is worth following, and worth believing, he is worth worshiping, he is worth trusting, he is worth imaging, he is worth knowing and making known.

E. You do not trust my efforts. (21)

If I could earn it, then what on earth did Christ die for? He died because I could not earn it.

I have a pastor friend who loves to golf and is very good at it. Many years ago now, he invited me to play at the TPC course in Dearborn, which is not only one of the best courses in our area, but is a private club. A member of his church is a member of the club and because he had paid for it and provided for it, we were able to play. So, I show up in my old Nova with clubs that may have come from a garage sale. They were so bad that if I threw them in a lake in disgust, the lake would throw ‘em back. Talk about being way out of my element. There is valet parking at

this place! No one wants to drive my car! No one wants to handle my bags. I don't belong here, right? Wrong! A member of the club made it possible for me to be there, and while I may feel out of place, because of that member, I have all of the rights and privileges of anyone else. I can go into the carpeted locker room and dry my hands with the towels that are folded in stacks. I can splash some cologne on my face from the bottles on the sinks. I can use the lockers and I can go out on the course and play a round of golf. It is not because I am a member but because I get to share in the privileges of membership because of one who is. I want to ask you a couple of questions:

- Should I avail myself of what this member has provided for me? Should I believe him and enjoy the gifts that are given? Yes!

- Should I act as if I earned these on my own? No!

We're in the family because Christ paid our way in. We all share in the same privileges because of him. But, all came in rust-bucket clunkers and while we really belong, it is not because we've done a thing to earn it. Enjoy grace, but remember, we are here because someone else paid the dues.