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Communion

Ephesians 1:7–8 - In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace <sup>8</sup> which He lavished on us.

Ephesians 2:8–9 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, *it is* the gift of God; <sup>9</sup> not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

Philippians 4:13 I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.

Romans 8:1 Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

Romans 8:2 For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.

Romans 8:28 And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to *His* purpose.

Romans 8:31 What then shall we say to these things? If God *is* for us, who *is* against us?

Romans 8:38–39 For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, <sup>39</sup> nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he is* a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

Ephesians 3:20–21 Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, <sup>21</sup> to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

As we come to the table of the Lord, we have much to celebrate in Christ – forgiveness, life, power, a new identity, we are loved, free, not ever condemned, fully righteous, accepted completely by grace. He, Jesus, has done it all. Servers come.

Have you ever been driving down the road and see something and think – “someone should do something about that.” But you drive on. Not your problem and it’s not a problem you care enough about to do anything. Have you ever been in a conversation and you know what the person is saying is not right, but it’s not that important, so you just let it go. It’s not worth the fight, you think. But what if the issue is one of a critical nature. Being wrong has severe consequences. Would you have the courage to confront? What if the person who needs correcting is your mentor, your good friend, your pastor?

Paul walks into one of those moments in Galatians 2. And he is not confronting Pharisees or Judaizers, or Pagans. He is confronting none other than the Apostle Peter because Peter is wrong and the stakes are high.

### **Galatians 2:11–13**

**<sup>11</sup> But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. <sup>12</sup> For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he *began* to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. <sup>13</sup> The**

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**rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.**

To understand what's happening, you must have some context. According to Jewish law, a good and proper Jew couldn't eat with Gentiles because they ate unkosher food. But, because Jesus came and fulfilled the law and it was all about grace now, the unity of the church overrode the rules of the past. It wasn't that only eating kosher food was wrong, it was imposing a religious piety or superiority to it. But, make no mistake, in Christ, the obligation of the law had been erased. So, the context here is that Peter freely ate with Gentiles until Jewish leaders from Jerusalem showed up. What makes Peter do this? Fear of Being Rejected.

### **Seeking Man's Approval Often Leads to Spiritual Compromise**

He slipped into compromise because he wanted to fit in with people who were probably known to him, even some of his pals from the past. I identify with Peter here because I've had a struggle with this fear in the past. I've made decisions sometimes based on earning approval rather than what's best or what's right or even true.

I remember a point in my ministry long before I came here that I had messed things up in my search for acceptance and I prayed and prayed that God would deal with my people pleasing, my need to be accepted. Thank God He answered my prayer. He put me in a situation where nearly everybody in my life rejected me. It was horrible. But through that situation, the closeness of Jesus was never greater because He convinced me that His acceptance, His approval, my adoption in Him was everything. It's where I discovered Jesus plus nothing equals everything. What about you – Is Jesus enough?

Something else that I think is driving Peter here is how hard it is to leave the patterns of the past. Jewish law-keeping was so ingrained in him, and it was biblical, from Moses. He knew the truth that in Christ, all that had been removed but here were these strong Jewish leaders and he fell back into old ways of thinking, old patterns.

We do the same thing. We grow up believing our worth as a human being is all centered in what we do. So, we strive for good grades, doing nice things for others, being a good person. But in Christ, we are instantly given goodness in Him. We don't deserve it, but that's why they call it grace. But then there are times we slip back into thinking our efforts matter and want recognition by others or we see the sin patterns of our past erupt from time to time and begin to think I need to try harder, do better. People need to appreciate me more, I need to work at sinning less, etc. The old ways of thinking can get so ingrained in us that we fall back into them from time to time even though we know that in Christ, all that has changed.

Paul sees the compromise Peter is making. Do you think Paul is going to ignore this? Now, before I read on, put yourself in Antioch at a big potluck dinner of believers. Everyone is enjoying the fellowship eating with one another. Peter's there eating with Gentiles because it didn't matter. They are all one in Christ. Then some Jewish leaders from Jerusalem arrive and everything changes. The Jews move to one side of the room, and the Gentiles are relegated to a more secluded area. It goes back to the way it used to be. Peter is confronted with a choice as to whom he will sit with and he chooses poorly. He shuns the Gentiles to be with his people. Then Paul enters and sees this division, and he knows exactly what has occurred because this is the way it was before Jesus came and broke down the wall between Jews and Gentiles and made them one body in Him. Paul is not happy. Verse 14.

**14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? 15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but**

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**through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified. 17 “But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 “For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 “For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 “I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me. 21 “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”**

Why is Paul telling the churches in Galatia about this confrontation with Peter? He wants them to know how dangerous it is when you attach any kind of human behavior to grace which is what they were doing. He wants them to know that even Peter fell into this trap of adding to grace. Not only that it sets up one of the greatest explanations of the gospel anywhere in Scripture. So let look at it.

In verse 16, Paul uses the word justified three times. The word means to be innocent or completely righteous, a good person. Here’s what we learn about justification in the verse. No one qualifies by good works. You can only be righteous by faith in Jesus. Even Jewish people are justified only by faith in Jesus. We get this – don’t we? We don’t ever analyze our behavior as some sort of gauge of righteousness. We don’t monitor our sin levels or elevate our good deeds to be noticed, do we? No man is justified in the flesh. You have no goodness without Jesus.

### **Stop Analyzing Behavior Because Goodness is Only in Jesus**

People beat themselves up over their sin and make promises to never do it again only to do it again. They think analyzing their behavior, heap on enough guilt, maybe get an accountability partner, do everything possible to control their behavior and then they will avoid sin and live righteously. Paul is saying here that no one is justified by behavior because quite frankly you don’t have it in you – none of us do.

Your sin, my sin, is a reminder that we need Jesus. Sin in a Christian only occurs when there is distance from Jesus. You cannot abide in Jesus and sin at the same time. Do you have a sin problem? Then return to the abiding presence of Jesus.

Paul knows that his Judaizer critics are saying that his theology of justification by faith alone apart from any moral requirements is dangerous. The argument would go like this: “Your doctrine of justification by faith only is dangerous, for by eliminating the law you also eliminate a man’s sense of moral responsibility. If a person can be accounted righteous simply by believing that Christ died for him, why then should he bother to keep the law or, for that matter, why should he bother to live by any standard of morality? There is no need to be good. The result of your doctrine is that men will believe in Christ but thereafter do as they desire.”

That sounds logical doesn’t it? Think of it this way. Let’s say a man is caught stealing. He’s a professional thief and yet when he gets to court, he is declared innocent of the charge. Not only that, but he can also never again be charged with this crime. He is completely pardoned for now and all eternity. Now, think about that for a minute. That thief turns to his lawyer and says “did I hear this right? I can’t ever be convicted of stealing for the rest of my life no matter what I do?” The lawyer says that’s right. If that thief knows he can never be tried for stealing the rest of his life, what do you think he’s going to start doing a lot of? That’s the fear of these legalistic Jews. If we just tell people they are completely forgiven by God’s grace and have been set free from the penalty of sin forever, what motivation are they going to have to be good? There must be some rules, or they’ll just start sinning up a storm because they can’t be held accountable.

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Is it true that righteousness is ours simply by believing in Christ? Yes. Doesn't it also make it true then that our behavior good or bad isn't connected to our righteousness? Yes. So doesn't that make the logical argument that if righteousness has nothing to do with my behavior, then I'm free to behave any way I want. Let's see how Paul deals with this.

Yes, through grace you are legally acquitted for your sin and free behaviorally. But he says that's only part of what happens through grace. Don't stop there.

### **19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God.**

He is saying the law or finding my value in what I do has died. In other words, if I think grace is only a legal pardon that allows me to live however I want, I have not truly experienced Jesus. There hasn't been an internal transformation. If I keep sinning or see God's grace as a get out of jail free card and now, I can live however I want, I'm the same person I've always been. He says I died to the law so that I might live. The whole system of behavior based worth has been rendered dead by the grace of Jesus Christ. Worth now comes from the life of Jesus living in us. Because of the grace shown to me by Jesus, I am a new person. The thief doesn't continue to steal because he's no longer a thief.

There are two parts to Paul's thesis here:

**LEGAL - Justification = Innocent**, Forgiveness from all Sin, the Cross

**SPIRITUAL - Regeneration = New Life** in Christ, the Resurrection

Then he gives us in one verse the entire summation of this whole life in Christ.

### **20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and 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 up for me.**

Do you believe this? Really? The old life is dead. That was the life of self-validation. That was where you contributed or so you thought to your goodness. Your crucifixion was with Jesus on the cross. It was there that everything about the former life was put to death which means you are free from the consequence of that life.

### **You Are Dead to the Old Life – Live Like It**

Now, whether you believe that or not is up to you, but it's true. If you are a believer in Jesus and have put your faith in Him, you have been released from the condemnation, the penalty of performance-based validation. Here's a way of thinking about it.

Let's say one day I decide to rob a convenience store because I need some quick cash. Because I'm a terrible criminal, I end up shooting the store owner and he dies. I am arrested, tried, and found guilty and sentenced to life in prison. I am paying the penalty for the wrong I had done. But one day in prison, someone kills me. Wouldn't it be odd, weird, or morbid, for the prison officials to say that I needed to continue serving out the consequences of my crime. They would take my corpse and put it to bed at night, prop it up at the breakfast table, etc. Once you're dead, you are free.

But it's not just that you are free from the consequence of failed self-worth, you have risen not to a remodeled self-life, but a brand-new life that is not you at all, but Him. You trust Him, have faith in Him to live His life in you, as you. After all, He has purchased you by His shed blood.

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Knowing that you are loved completely, accepted unconditionally, adopted fully, and have received the riches of the fruit of His Holy Spirit, changes everything inside. You can't believe your good fortune to have found such a life. How could you ever go back to the bondage, the slavery of behavior-based validation, the system of this world?

There's a story from Civil War days before America's slaves were freed, about a northerner who went to a slave auction and purchased a young slave girl. As they walked away from the auction, the man turned to the girl and told her, "You're free." With amazement she responded, "You mean, I'm free to do whatever I want?" "Yes," he said. "And to say whatever I want to say?" "Yes, anything." "And to be whatever I want to be?" "Yep." "And even go wherever I want to go?" "Yes," he answered with a smile. "You're free to go wherever you'd like." She looked at him intently and replied, "Then I will go with you."

There is no way a truly redeemed, reborn believer who realizes his incredibly good fortune in the new life of Jesus would ever choose to return to the bondage of self-validation. Verse 21 tells us that if it is true that good works, obeying religious rules, is any part of salvation, then Christ died needlessly. If we can do it ourselves, why did He come. Because we can't – we need Him.

You may be here today and realize that you have never been spiritually changed. You have prayed a prayer they told you pray and thought that was enough. You started living a Christian-type lifestyle thinking changing your behavior would be enough. You may have even gotten baptized fulfilling what you thought were the behavioral requirements to get to heaven. But inside, you know nothing has changed. My invitation is to come before Jesus, the lamb of God and die with Him. Let Him remove the heart of stone and exchange it for the new life of His Spirit. You can't live a life good enough; you need Him. He's waiting.

You may be someone who knows you have had that heart change but have become consumed with the temporary. Job, family, health issues, finances, relationships, have grabbed your attention. You seldom pray, worship is routine or even boring to you, sinful patterns have crept back in, and it's been a long time since you've had an intimate moment with Jesus. Why? Why have you walked back into the prison cell of your former life when Christ has set you free? You're sitting there in the prison of the temporary, and the jailor is nowhere to be found, the door is wide open. Why are you sitting there? Get up and walk into the freedom of Jesus. He has paid your ransom. He has secured your freedom. Why are you sitting there?