

Text: Galatians 2.11-21  
St Stephen's

May 5/6, 2007  
Sat/Sun

## Trusting or Trying

I loved Bill's confession at the start of his message last week, that he is a creature of habit. He always has his keys in his left pocket, and in his right pocket he has his mints and his cell phone and chapstick. He always parks his car in the same place.

I have a confession. I know I have my keys in a pocket, but I don't know which one. And I forgot my mints. And I never leave my keys in the same place at home. I always have to search for them. We had a fun day on Thursday. It turned out. Someone parked in Bill's parking spot. Now we all know where it is. Turned out it was Steve Matson's car. But Mark Steffy put it there. We offer Bill some soap and shaving cream to go out and decorate it, and he almost took it!

Well, his personal routines were a great illustration of how we all tend to be creatures of habit. "We never did it that way before", we say. But the gospel can free us from unthinking habits, and bring a wonderful freedom to do things God's way. We call that **gospel freedom**, and Galatians is all about **Gospel freedom**.

But gospel **freedom can be lost**. It is a vulnerable gift. If you change the gospel, you will lose the freedom. And when you lose it, slowly but surely you lose the joy of the gospel and the power of the gospel and the new life of the gospel. It is easy to do.

We are in a struggle to preserve the gospel **in the mainline churches** these days. The battle in the Episcopal church is all about the power of the gospel to change any and every life, to heal any and every broken life, even those that are sexually broken – it's about whether we will put the gospel front and center in Western culture.

This is exactly **why the letter to the Galatians was written**. So Galatians is a letter for us, today. A special word from God about the

freedom of the Gospel.

Some years after Paul planted the Galatian churches, **other teachers** came in and opened up a two front attack on Paul. **They attacked his gospel and his ministry.** In short Paul's response is to say that **his Gospel** is not something he made up – it came **directly from Jesus Christ.**

*For I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from man, nor was I taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ.*

Galatians 1:11-12 (RSV)

And **his ministry** is not something he undertook on his own. It also came **straight from Jesus Christ.**

*Paul an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—*

Galatians 1:1 (RSV)

So this is **his claim.** That his gospel and his ministry were both given directly from the risen Lord Jesus and carry the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ.

## Here is His Gospel

Up till now, Paul has been talking about the **source** of the gospel and the **ministry** of the gospel and the **importance** of the gospel. Now, in vs 16 of chapter 2, Paul finally explains the Gospel.

*We... know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

Galatians 2:16 (RSV)

Paul uses in these sentences for the first time in his letters an important word, "**justified**". It is a word borrowed from the law courts of his day, and it means the **opposite of 'condemned'**. As Paul uses it, it doesn't mean 'found not guilty because you didn't do anything wrong', but rather

something more like 'though you did many things wrong, you are pardoned, fully, freely, and forever'. Some people have explained it by **expanding the word** 'justified' to 'just as if I'd' never sinned – though I did and do. Here's **my phrase** for it: "pardoned, forgiven, and welcomed home."

It is a wonderful thing, a gospel thing. The question is, **how does it happen?** Well, Paul has **two answers** to that. He says it **doesn't happen one way** and it **does happen another way**.

### **How Justification Does Not Happen.**

*We... know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

Galatians 2:16 (RSV)

Paul repeats **the phrase "by works of the law"** three times in vs 16. He is referring, of course, to the Jewish law – all of it. The moral law, the civil law, the religious law – and repeatedly says that keeping this law will **not** 'make you right' with God.

A couple of weeks ago, Steve called this **the Performance Plan**. And what is wrong with the Performance Plan? Well, the problem is **not** with **the plan**. The law is God's and it is 'good'. **The problem is** with **the performance**. We always fail. In fact, when the law intersects with fallen human nature, it produces **rebellion or despair or pride**. Every time. The performance plan is a killer. Rebellion because we don't want to be told what to do. Or despair, because we can't do it. Or pride because if we do manage to do it a little we right away **get proud** about it, brag about it. I remember the first time I **tithed**. I was so proud. You begin to think that God is especially pleased with you, that he **owes** you. That we have **earned** his favor.

Don't you hate it when people get like that? I mean other people... we are talking about other people here...

## How Justification Does Happen.

*We... know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

Galatians 2:16 (RSV)

Again Paul uses a very important phrase 3 times in this verse, "**faith in Jesus Christ**". **How are you set right with God?**

Not by works of the law, but by faith in Christ.

Not by my earning, but by Christ's giving.

Not by trying, but by trusting.

Not by what I do, but by what he has done.

Not by self-improvement, but by self-surrender.

**By faith in Jesus Christ**

Right here something often happens. You begin to **wonder about your faith**. Is my faith strong enough? Steady enough? What if we have a season of **doubt**? What if I have **honest questions**? What if I believe in my head, but my heart sometimes seems to have a mind of its own?

We get **anxious** and **worried**, and instead of the gospel lifting the weight of our salvation from our shoulders to Christ's, that crushing weight descends again back on us as we anxiously examine our faith. Do you see what is happening? We are worried about whether we are good enough. We are sneaking **back onto the performance plan**.

I want to pause a moment here to **pay attention to the Greek grammar** behind these phrases. In most translations all three phrases are translated 'faith **in** Jesus Christ'. But in the **original Greek language**, the first and third phrases are different than the second. The difference is that **the preposition 'in'** in those phrases is literally **the preposition 'of'**. Look at the overhead with me...

*We... know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith **in/of** Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith **in/of** Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

## Galatians 2:16 (RSV)

What does Paul mean when he uses the phrase, 'faith **of** Christ'? It is a particular kind of grammatical construction that can mean either "**our faith in** Christ" or "Christ's **faithfulness to us**". And **Paul means to say they go together**. If I were to translate this more carefully, we could write it like this.

*We... know that a man is not justified by works of the law but through **the faithfulness of** Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by **the faithfulness of** Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.*

## Galatians 2:16 (RSV)

**The secret of faith** is that it **looks away from us to Christ**. It looks at his strength, his love, his death, his victory, his promises. **It looks away from me and up to him**. To the one who loves us. Who has died for us. Who has said, I will never fail you or forsake you. That is what **makes faith strong**. Looking up to him.

**A man is climbing a mountain** when he falls and will die if he is not rescued. From way above, he hears a helicopter coming, and finally they winch down a basket to save him. He looks at the basket, looks above to his rescuers, and drops into the basket. Slowly and surely, his rescuers hoist him to safety.

**How was he saved?** Did his drop save him? Well, he will not be rescued unless he drops into the basket. But all he has to do is to drop into the basket. That is **what faith does**. It **looks up at him** – at his strength, his love, his promises, his faithfulness - **and drops**. Surrenders. Yields. Paul says those who drop into his arms shall be rescued, pardoned, forgiven and welcomed home. That is the Gospel.

I want to close with three brief comments about this gospel

## Keep It Safe!

It is a constant theme in this letter that **the Gospel must be guarded**

by what we teach and how we live. Even Peter distorted to the gospel. What did Paul do? The same thing he always did...

*we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*

Galatians 2:5 (RSV)

**Every generation** is given the responsibility to guard the Gospel. **Every church** must guard the gospel. We have in front of us a tremendous contest in the mainline denominations with those who would change the gospel. We dare not give in. We must be clear and gracious and courageous for the gospel. We do it **for the sake of our children** and our grandchildren and for the sake of those who have not yet heard the gospel. Every generation must steward the gospel to those who come after. No matter what the cost.

Guard the Gospel. There is **nothing like it** in the world. Because it is the power of God to rescue people, to take the crushing load of performance off our shoulders, and carry us in the grace of God.

Here is the second of the surpassing gospel calls upon us.

## **Turn It Loose!**

*I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

Galatians 2:20 (RSV)

This is one of the greatest verses in Galatians. What Paul is saying is that when he let go of the performance plan, he was caught by Christ, and there was this tremendous lifting power of Christ that **lifted him, carried him, changed him.** God turned the power of the gospel loose inside Paul and all around Paul. To the ends of his heart and to the ends of the earth. Turn the gospel loose. Inside you. Outside you. Everywhere. We will come back to this theme in the weeks to come.

The third surpassing call of the Gospel is the most important...

## **Prayer: Make it Yours**

Maybe you have not yet dropped into that basket... You've been living on the performance strategy for too long, and you are weary... Lord Jesus. I let go, and drop into your arms....