

Welcome: We're spending our fall looking at Harbor's mission from two distinct angles! First, we are walking through the letter of Galatians, which tells us what God has done in history through His Son Jesus Christ to bring us back to Himself! And then, for the remainder of the year, we are going to consider what it means for us to individually and collectively join Jesus in His mission to *Help People Find Their Way Back to God*.

Paul wrote the letter of Galatians around 55AD, during a time when group of religious leaders had made their way into the church and were confusing and frustrating the believers by teaching what Paul referred to as a pretend-gospel.

Jesus Plus: They were essentially saying, *"It's good to believe in Jesus, but if you want to walk in a right relationship with God, you also need to follow the Mosaic Law...you need ritual and custom! Men, you need to be circumcised! Then you'll be saved!"*

But Paul will respond by saying over and over... *"No, you don't need Jesus plus the law or custom, or Jesus plus anything. You simply need Jesus!"* The gospel has always been about Jesus and what He has done to bring us back to our Heavenly Father!

Now...as we read Galatians, there might be a tendency on our part to think that Paul was speaking to a bunch of spiritual rookies with short-term memory issues...but when we come to chapter two, we see that this isn't the case at all. At the heart of the controversy were some of the most well-known and well-respected church leaders, not only of the day, but in all of historical Christianity."

Look with me at Galatians 2:11...

"But when Peter came to Antioch, I had to oppose him to his face, for what he did was very wrong. When he first arrived, he ate with Gentile Christians, who were not circumcised. But afterward, when some friends of James came, Peter wouldn't eat with the Gentiles anymore. He was afraid of criticism from these people who insisted on the necessity of circumcision. As a result, other Jewish Christians followed Peter's hypocrisy, and even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy."

Galatians 2:11-13

Stop there for a moment! Do you notice the names that Paul is dropping? **Peter**...the disciple who looked at Jesus and said, *"I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God,"* and to whom Jesus responded, *"You're right...and I'll build my church on what you say!"* **James**, the brother of Jesus! **Barnabas** traveled with Paul across the ancient world preaching the gospel and planting churches...

This is an all-star lineup!

And yet Paul says...I had to oppose them for being exclusive, hypocritical, and racist!

Now...there's some good news and bad news here! Good news first!

Peter...probably the most revered church leader in all of history, had to be reprimanded by Paul for getting the gospel wrong, yet God was gracious toward Him and Peter died proclaiming the greatness of Jesus. Toward the end of his life, he wrote 1st and 2nd Peter, and if your letter makes it into the Holy Bible, you have some street cred! **So, the Good News is that God is good and gracious toward us even when we get things terribly wrong!**

Here's the bad news! Peter, James, and Barnabas got it wrong, which means there's a pretty good chance that even if we understand the gospel, we don't really understand it fully, and will have a tendency to get it wrong as well!

So...we've got to ask the question. How did Peter get the gospel wrong? And then, how we get it wrong today? And...by the time we're through, we'll look at what we can do to ensure that we're continually holding on to and walking in the gospel!

First...let's see how Peter got it wrong. Look at verse 14...

"When I saw that they were not following the truth of the gospel ..." Galatians 2:14

The word, "following" comes from the Greek word, *Orthopodeo*, and it means, "to walk straight."

Podeo – podiatrist...see for a foot problem.

Ortho – orthodontist...see for a crooked teeth problem.

When Paul saw Peter, James, and Barnabas, he noticed that they were not walking straight in the truth of the gospel!

How? They had stopped eating with the Gentile Christians!

During ancient times, the sharing of meals was a sign of acceptance and friendship! The same is also true today!

Elizabeth Elliot – One of my greatest memories is that of sharing dessert with Elizabeth Elliot! Some of you have no idea who Elizabeth Elliot is... In the mid 1950's while attempting to make contact and share the gospel with the Auca Indians in Ecuador, Elizabeth's husband and his four missionary friends were killed by the trib. Rather than becoming resentful, Elizabeth spent several years seeking friendship and reconciliation and ultimately led a majority of the tribe to Jesus. In spite of this,

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I'll never think of Elizabeth simply as a missionary and author...she's a friend! We shared dessert! I don't share food with just anyone...ask our staff! Jeff doesn't hug...I don't share straws!

In choosing not to eat with Gentiles, Peter was effectively saying to them,
"Something is wrong with you, therefore I can't be around you..."

Now, what makes this interesting is that we have an encounter recorded in the book of Acts, chapter 10, where God appeared to Peter in a dream and told him to go to the house of a Roman Centurion named Cornelius. And there, Peter preached the gospel to Cornelius' family, they responded in faith and were baptized into Christ as the first Gentile Christians!

Later on in the book of Acts, Peter stood up at a church council to share about this experience as evidence that God accepts both Jews and Gentiles. Listen to his words!

"So why are you now challenging God by burdening the Gentile believers with a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors were able to bear (law). We believe that we are all saved the same way, by the undeserved grace of the Lord Jesus." Acts 15:10-11

Peter knew the gospel! That we are fully loved and accepted because of what Jesus Christ has done, not because we obey the law! **He was a champion and defender of the gospel, yet he lost hold of the gospel and became legalistic!**

It would be easy for us to read this text and say, *"I've never excluded myself from others on the basis of law or circumcision so this must not apply to me."* But I want to press against that!

Legalism – Legalism, at its core, is simply looking to something besides Jesus to make yourself clean and acceptable.

Let me give you some examples of how this plays its way out in our lives!

Religious Legalism – First...there's religious legalism, which says, *"If you follow our rules, dress like us, talk like us, behave like us, believe like us, then you can be one of us! But if you don't do those things, you don't belong with us or with God! So...if any one of us says in our heart, "God accepts me because I act a certain way...or because I've always done this or never done that, or because I'm a good husband or father, or because I go to this church, walked through those sacraments, or take this doctrinal position..." If we say, "God accepts for anything other than the grace of God given*

me in Jesus Christ, crucified for my sins, then we've slipped into religious legalism!"

Secular Legalism – The word legalism simply means; ***“Adherence to a law or formula.”*** And there are all kinds of unwritten, unspoken laws and formulas that exist in our culture, which tell us whether or not we are acceptable!

It could be the quality of our education or career, whether we are intelligent, beautiful, or successful. It could be how attractive or comfortable our lifestyle is.

These are some of the things we grab hold of to determine our own significance and value...

Work – This is why some of you work endless amounts of hours even though it exhausts you and the people you love. You're convinced that if you work hard enough and accomplish much, you'll finally be accepted! The problem isn't work (work is a gift)...it's that **you're looking to work as your Savior!**

Money – Some of you are pursuing comfort and safety in a lifestyle, and therefore, you would never consider that you have enough...nor will you give your money away in extravagant ways! The problem isn't money (it is a gift), it's that money has become your Savior! You can't possibly give...

Sex – Finally, this is why many of us, as followers of Christ, have in the past, or are currently sexually involved with another person or multiple people outside of the context of marriage...even though we know the Scriptures say that sex is a gift to be experienced and enjoyed within the exclusive and permanent covenant of marriage? We justify our actions because we're looking to sex for beauty and acceptance! You might desperately long for affection, and sex is a means to get that. You might be looking for power or control, and sex is a way of proving that you can attract someone and win them over. Some of you want independence, and sex is a way of saying, I'll do what I want, when I want! The problem isn't sex...sex is a gift...it's that we hijack sex and use it as a means of securing the acceptance our hearts so desperately long for.

But don't you see that at the end of the day, sex, work, lifestyle and religious conformity will never give you the kind of cleanliness and acceptance you're looking for.

Adam and Eve – There's no clearer place to see this than in the story of Adam and Eve, Genesis 2-3. God gave them everything including himself, and yet they didn't believe that God was enough! They wanted to run the world! But the moment they sinned, they felt naked and ashamed. They no longer felt accepted.

Since that moment...everyone born into the world has known the nagging feeling of being unclean and unacceptable.

Since that moment, we've been pursuing acceptance and cleanness in everything but Jesus Christ...while only Jesus can provide it! Listen to Paul's words...

*"You and I are Jews by birth, not 'sinners' like the Gentiles. Yet we know that a person is **made right** with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law. And we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we might be **made right** with God because of our faith in Christ, not because we have obeyed the law. For no one will ever be **made right** with God by obeying the law."*

Galatians 2:15-16

Three times, Paul uses the phrase "made right" which, is also the word, "justified."

Justify – When you justify something, you don't change the fact of it, you change the view of it! What happened happened, but in justification, you see it differently!

Time: Men...I'm sure none of you have done this, but occasionally I'll arrive at home later than when I've told Beth I would arrive, and my tendency is to want to justify myself, "I was late because of traffic...I got caught in a conversation at the office," and those things may be true, but had I managed my time better, I would have been home on time. Now...I'm not trying to change the fact that I was late...I was late! I'm trying to change the way Beth views my lateness...lame!

When it comes to the gospel, to be justified means that through Jesus Christ, though our record hasn't changed, God's view is changed! We are still sinful and wrong and selfish and broken in countless ways, but now God sees us as good, righteous, pure, and lovely! The gospel isn't that you go clean up and bring God your righteousness. But that God covers you in his righteousness! **Listen to Paul's words...verse 20!**

"My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20

Gospel: The gospel is that by the grace of God, Jesus took our record, and we get His! Jesus took our punishment, and we get His reward! Jesus took our guilt and shame, and we in turn are called 'innocent.' Jesus died so that we can live the rest of our lives delighting in and loving God!

Wedding: The best example I can find is of a wedding. 14 years ago, Beth walked down the aisle to become my bride! Now...as she stood in front of me, all that I saw was beauty and purity and flawlessness! Was Beth truly flawless in that moment? Of course she was! Of course we weren't...which is why we said to one another, *"I'm yours...better or worse...because when you say yes to someone for life, you're getting their best and their worst.* Since that day when we made a covenant together, Beth has been my bride, and nothing will change that!

Do you know, that the Scriptures describe our relationship to Christ as a bride, groom relationship!

In the book of Ephesians...Paul writes...

"Husbands, this means love your wives, just as Christ loved the church. He gave up his life for her to make her holy and clean, washed by the cleansing of God's word. He died this to present her to himself as a glorious church without a spot or wrinkle or any other blemish. Instead, she will be holy and without fault."

Ephesians 5:25-27

Do you know that if you have placed the trust of your heart in Jesus and his death on your behalf...when Jesus sees you, He sees you different than you see you...because you are justified!

You see your **soiled past**...but He sees a **spotless** bride!

You see all of your **faults and limitations**...but he sees a bride without **blemish or wrinkle**.

You see everything that you believe makes you unlovable or undesirable, but Christ sees in you One whom He loved and desired so much that He was willing to die to get you!

The gospel of grace is that we are far more wicked than we dared believe, but more loved and accepted in Christ than we dared imagine!

Do you believe this? Are you looking for acceptance and cleanness in religion...in work, love, lovemaking, money, success? You'll never find it there! Only when you come to the One who made your heart for Himself will your heart be filled!

Application: What does this mean? As we close, I want to suggest a few very practical points of application that we find in this text!

First...We Never Outgrow the Gospel!

Growing: Every day in the Mullenix home, we have a conversation that goes something like this... *"I can't wait until I turn...because then I'm going to. I can't wait until Christmas (and it's June). I can't wait until my birthday (which was yesterday)."* Brooks just started 5th grade at a new school and he's loving it...but the other day, three weeks into the school year, he said to me, *"Dad...I can't wait until 7th grade."* As parents, you're always encouraging your children to live in the moment...

But what children express is what each of us desires! To grow up...to mature...to experience something new!

Unfortunately, I find all too often that Christians apply this inappropriately to their faith! There's the notion that the gospel is something we apply to our lives one time, but then we grow past it! *"Of course Jesus died for me, let's talk about the deep stuff."* So you have people moving from church to church looking for something deeper! And others getting stuck in the notion that that there is some kind of special knowledge or experience that we're supposed to be having!

No...we see in this text that we don't grow past our need for the gospel. We grow up in our appreciation and love for the gospel! Paul didn't call Peter, James, and Barnabas to a deeper doctrine...but to a renewed understanding of Jesus Christ crucified for our sins...

Action: Set your heart on the gospel over and over again! Like a good meal, come back to it, feast on it, and celebrate it! **The gospel is the heart of the Christian life, and when it gets into your heart, it will change you...**

Second: All our Sin is a Failure to Hold Onto the Gospel!

Notice that when Paul confronted Peter, he didn't say, *"Just follow the rules...you know what they are!"* What did Paul do? Paul said three times... *"Remember the gospel! We know that a person is made right with God by faith in Jesus Christ, not by obeying the law!"*

All of my sin and your sin comes about when we step away from believing and rejoicing in the gospel!

Insecure – Because you don't believe in your heart that Jesus Christ died to bring you into the security of his love.

Resentful and Unforgiving – You don't believe in your heart that God wasn't resentful toward you! That he forgave you, regardless of the fact that you didn't deserve or ask for it!

Worry (circumstances, health, money) – Because you don't celebrate the truth that if God gave you everything in Christ, won't he also meet your needs and walk with you in the good and bad!

Stingy – We're stingy because we don't believe that Jesus is our Ultimate Treasure...and that money is a gift for enjoyment, but for stewardship! To invest in causes close to the heart of God!

As Christians, we walk straight as we apply the truth of the gospel to every area of our lives!

I love how Martin Luther put this in his commentary on Galatians...

"Here we learn the truth of the gospel is the principle article of all Christian doctrine...most necessary is it that we know this article well, that we teach it to others and that we beat it into their heads continually." Martin Luther

Finally: Open Your Table

As we grasp the gospel more fully, we will draw near to people who look more and more unlike ourselves!

Let me ask you. Who are you opening your home to? Who are gathering around the table with to share a meal? Are you doing it at all?

If so, do they look, act, talk, dress just like you do, or is there diversity?

I believe that there are few more powerful ways available today to communicate the gospel simply and practically than when we share our table with one another...and with those who don't yet know Jesus personally!

Action: I'm going to encourage you this week...as we began last! Pray each day for one person by asking God to bring His grace to work in their lives. And then consider sharing a meal with them...a neighbor...a family member...a colleague!

Never underestimate the power of a simple invitation!

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PRAY!