

“Gospel Renewal” - Part #1

Text: Galatians 2:11-16

~ Delivered at Central Baptist Church on September 10, 2017 by Pastor Barton Priebe

INTRODUCTION

- **(SHOW SLIDE 1)** Please open your Bibles to Galatians 2.
- I want to take our time this morning to focus on the very heart of Christianity, which the Bible calls, “the gospel.” Gospel means “good news.”
 - The Bible says that this good news has the power to transform, or renew, everything in your life, this city, and the world.
 - This is why our vision statement says that Central Baptist strives to be a church that is **(SHOW SLIDE 2) “renewing our community through the gospel.”**
- In light of how broken our lives and our world are, I do not hesitate to say that this is the most important topic we can be talking about. For instance, the big issue that everyone is talking about this summer is racism.
 - It was only a few weeks ago that white supremacist and white nationalist groups gathered in Charlottesville, Virginia to protest the removal of a statue of General Robert Lee. They clashed violently with anti-racist and anti-fascist protestors.
 - One man drove his car into the crowd of counter protestors killing 32-year-old Heather Heyer and injuring 34 others. Since these horrific events, people have been grappling with how to develop a society that is free of racism. Racism is, of course, just one example of all that is wrong with the world.
- It is right here that we see how practical our passage is this morning. Here we have a case scenario that describes how the gospel works to transform our lives.
 - The case scenario deals with the apostle Peter’s racist tendencies, his Christian hypocrisy, and his failure to do what is right because he is afraid of what other people will think of him. How’s that for some juicy topics?
 - So we will see how the gospel transforms these specific topics but this is a case scenario that describes how the gospel functions to renew all parts of our lives.
- To that end let’s look at three things today. First, what the gospel is *not*. Second, what the gospel *is*. And third, how the gospel renews us.

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS NOT

- Let’s begin then by talking about **(SHOW SLIDE 3)** what the gospel is *not*.
 - Look at verse 16. **READ 16** - *we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also 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 no one will be justified.*
 - To be justified means to be right with God. It is a legal term that is the opposite of condemnation. It means to be a pardoned in God’s law court so that he opens the door and welcomes you into his presence. But how does this happen? How can we be justified?
- The default answer of every person, religion, and culture is that we are justified on the basis of what we do. You have to earn it. This is, after all, how much of life works. If you want a job you give your resume to an employer to prove that you deserve the position based on what you have done. If they agree, they open the door for you. If you want to get into University you give them your academic transcript to prove you have achieved the right to get in the door.
 - Since so much of life is like this, everyone assumes that it is the same with God. We default to thinking that if we live a good life we will build up a good enough resume for God to accept us and open the door to us.
- Aside from genuine Christianity, this is what all religions are about.

- The world’s religions say, **“Read this holy book, pray, go on pilgrimages, say Hail Mary’s, chant, meditate, obey these rules. If you do this your resume will be good enough and you will go to heaven, or escape the cycle of reincarnation, or whatever.”**
 - But when justification is based on what you do it can lead to self-hatred or to self-righteousness. Religious people can often be filled with self-hatred because they never feel like they can measure up. Or they can become very smug and self-righteous because they feel like they measure up better than others.
- But many people will say, **“This is why I’m not religious.”** Ah yes, but irreligious people are also driven by a need to justify themselves – not to God per se, but to themselves or to others.
 - For instance, many people strive to justify their existence through achievement in their career. A few years ago the famous movie director Sydney Pollack died. He won an Academy award for directing *Out of Africa*. He also directed films like *The Firm* with Tom Cruise and *The Interpreter* with Nicole Kidman. Despite health problems in his 70’s he refused to stop working.
 - He said, **(SHOW SLIDE 4)** **“Every time I finish a picture, I feel like I’ve done what I’m supposed to do in the sense that I’ve earned my stay for another year or so. I don’t know what use I have other than that. If I don’t make movies, what . . . do I do?”**¹
 - Pollack is always striving to justify his existence. But he never fully gets there. That’s because whether you are religious or irreligious we all work from the default position of gaining acceptance through achievement. It is justification through doing more and being better. This tends to either crush us or make us self-righteous.
- It is right here that the gospel message offers something totally different than religion or irreligion. The gospel demolishes all smugness and self-righteousness because it begins by saying that no one can be justified on the basis of his or her moral resume. Notice that in this verse Paul says three times that no one can be justified through “works of the law.” “Works of the law” refers to any human effort to be justified through what we do. That is, to say that **(SHOW SLIDE 5)** the gospel is *not* “build up your resume and offer it to God to earn acceptance.”
 - If you want to understand the good news you must first understand the bad news - that you stand condemned before God for your sins. The gospel rejects every human resume and shows us that we have a rap sheet that condemns us.
 - So that is the first point. That is what the gospel is *not*.

WHAT THE GOSPEL IS

- Let’s turn to the second point now and talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 6)** what the gospel is.
 - Here we discover that God has provided a totally different way to be justified. Again, he says it three times in verse 16. It is through “faith in Jesus Christ.” It is through trusting in Jesus and not yourself.
 - Jesus lived the perfect life that we should have lived. His resume is perfect. Even more, he took the rap sheet that details our sins and on the cross he took the judgement that was due to us on himself.
- **(SHOW SLIDE 7)** So the gospel is *not*, “build up your resume and offer it to God” but rather, “God has created a perfect resume through Jesus and offers it to you.”
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 8)** The gospel is *not*, “Be good and you will be justified” but rather, “You can never be good enough but Jesus is good enough. Trust him and God will justify you.”
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 9)** The gospel is *not*, “Earn your justification” but rather, “Receive justification as a gift.”
- This October 31st marks the 500th anniversary of the Reformation. It is a good time to reflect again on Martin Luther’s story. Before he understood the gospel, he was a monk. He writes, **“I was a good**

¹ <http://www.contactmusic.com/sydney-pollack/news/pollack-movies-justify-my-existence>

monk, and I kept the rules of my order so strictly that I may say that if ever a monk got to heaven by his monkery it was I.”²

- *I had hoped I might find peace of conscience with fasts, prayer, and the vigils with which I miserably afflicted my body, but the more I sweated it out like this, the less peace and tranquility I knew.”³ “I could not believe that anything that I thought or did or prayed satisfied God.”⁴*

- He was being crushed. But then, as he reflected on some passages in Romans he realized that God offers us Jesus’ perfect life and death as a gift. He saw that we are justified not by what we do but by what Jesus did for us. He then wrote, *“Thereupon I felt myself to be reborn and to have gone through open doors into paradise.”⁵*

- Luther wrote a commentary on Galatians. The preface of that commentary has had a major impact on history. In the middle of the 18th century there was a small group of university-aged men that literally went on to change western civilization. Among these men were names such as John Wesley, his brother Charles Wesley, and George Whitfield. People made fun of them and called them the “Methodists” because they were so methodical in trying to earn God’s favour through religious practices like fasting, prayers, and Bible study. But then they discovered the good news.

- One of them was named William Holland. He records in his diary that on May 17, 1738 he was with these other men and they were reading Luther’s preface to Galatians. Holland writes,
 - **(SHOW SLIDE 10)** *“Mr. Charles Wesley read the Preface aloud. At the words, ‘What, have we then nothing to do? No! nothing but only accept Him’ . . . there came such a power over me as I cannot well describe; my great burden fell off in an instant; my heart was so filled with peace and love that I burst into tears. I almost thought I saw our Savior! My companions, perceiving me so affected, fell on their knees and prayed. When I afterwards went into the street, I could scarcely feel the ground I trod upon.”⁶*

- Do you know this experience? Every one of us operate from a default position of thinking that we need to build up a resume to offer to God in hopes that he will accept us. The gospel is not just another version of that. It is something completely different. The gospel is about God creating a perfect resume in Jesus and offering it to us.

- Aren’t you exhausted from striving and striving but never feeling like you are good enough? Receive this good news. Pray something like this: **(SHOW SLIDE 11)** Say, *“Dear God, I reject my resume and receive Jesus whose perfect resume can justify me before you.”*
 - You know you rightly understand Christianity when you see it as the best news you have ever heard. You know you’ve got it right when you feel your pride crushed because you can’t measure up and yet, far from being filled with self-hatred, you are filled with security and joy because you see that through Jesus you are fully accepted and loved.

HOW THE GOSPEL RENEWS US

- We have seen that gospel begins by renewing our broken relationship with God. But now I want to show you that, once this is done, the gospel is also meant to renew every part of your life and, through you, the lives of others in society and around the world.
 - So in the third place let’s turn to talk about **(SHOW SLIDE 12)** how the gospel renews us.
- What we have here in Galatians 2 is a case scenario for how the gospel renews our lives. In this scenario two Christians get into a fight during a church potluck lunch. And it’s not just any Christians. This is between Peter and Paul. **READ 11** - *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.* What did Peter do that was so bad? Verse 12 explains.

² Roland Bainton, *Here I Stand* (Nashville: New American Library for Abington, 1978), 34.

³ Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 8, 326.

⁴ Luther, *Luther’s Works*, Vol. 34, 336.

⁵ Bainton, *Here I Stand*, 49.

⁶ Cited in Martin Luther, *Commentary on Galatians* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 12.

- **READ 12** - *For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.*
- We need to understand the background here. Peter was a Jew and Jews followed the Law of Moses. In the Law, God taught his people about the need to be ceremonially clean. So they could not eat or touch certain things or else they could not go to worship. They needed sacrifices for cleansing. But non-Jews, called Gentiles, ate pork and bacon and touched unclean things and so were unclean. So Jews did not eat with Gentiles lest they become unclean. This division resulted in a sense of racial superiority among the Jews.
 - But when Jesus came he said he fulfilled all these laws. His death brought cleansing as the once and for all sacrifice. As a result, all the old divisions of ethnicity were broken down.
 - To make this point, God had even given Peter a vision in Acts 10-11 where he was commanded to eat meat that he considered unclean but that God now declared to be clean. This was to teach him that Jew and Gentile are equal in Christ and there should be no separation.
- So Peter and Paul are now in the city of Antioch. Peter has been there for a while and, as Paul says in verse 14 he has been living like a Gentile Christian. That is, he regularly attends the potluck lunch in the Fellowship Hall where he eats with Gentile Christians. I don't have any verse to back this up but I think these Jews and Gentiles celebrated their oneness in Christ by feasting on God's greatest gift to humanity, which is bacon.
 - Peter probably posted a picture like this (**SHOW SLIDE 13**) on Instagram that shows a pig in a BBQ that is wrapped in strips of bacon with the caption, "*now that's what I call a pig in a blanket.*" (**SHOW SLIDE 14**) Or this one that shows stack of bacon and says, "*how to make the perfect BLT. B – Bacon. L – little more bacon. T – topped with bacon.*" And when the Fellowship committee suggested they add lettuce to the potluck, Peter posted this (**SHOW SLIDE 15**) this picture of bacon that says, "*#alternatelettuce.*"
 - The point however is not *what* he ate but *who* he ate with.
- But then everything went south. Some men came from James. They said that to be truly justified before God you had to believe in Jesus but you also had to *do* many things such as be circumcised and remain clean by not eating with Gentiles. So justification was based on faith in Jesus *but also* on building up a resume.
 - Peter did not believe this but we read that his old cowardice came back. He who denied Christ three times for fear of what others would think of him now separates from the Gentile Christians for fear of what these powerful men will think of him.
 - In verse 13 we read that the rest of the Jewish Christians in the church did this as well. Even Barnabas followed them. In verse 13 Paul calls this what it actually is: hypocrisy.
- That's the background. Now imagine the scene. Paul has just walked into the potluck lunch in the Fellowship Hall. He sees how all the Jewish Christians have separated themselves from Gentile Christians.
 - Paul is furious because all of this is saying that a person has to obey the Jewish Law if they want to truly be a Christian. It is justification by faith in Jesus *plus* doing works of the Law. It is Jesus *plus* your resume. But that is not the gospel. And so Paul confronts Peter. Maybe it was right then and there or maybe they called a church meeting.
 - Whatever the case, it all comes back to the gospel. Verse 14 is the key to the whole passage and the key to what I want to show us in this point. He says in verse 14 that "*their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel.*" Here we learn two things.

THE GOSPEL IS FOR CHRISTIANS

- First, (**SHOW SLIDE 16**) renewal begins when we recognize that the gospel is for Christians (not just non-Christians).
 - Many Christians assume that the gospel is for non-Christians. It is the elementary stuff. The ABC's. But once you are justified you move past it to more advanced things.

- My first sermon at Central was on keeping the main thing the main thing and how the gospel is the main thing. I've had a fair number of people say they were worried about this and even thought of leaving the church because they understood this to mean that we will only focus on the elementary truths that non-Christians need to hear and so won't talk about how Christians grow.
 - I empathize with this way of thinking because I used to think that way as well. But it is a fundamental misunderstanding of the gospel, of what the Christian life is all about, and how you grow as a Christian.
 - Paul roots this entire situation in Peter's failure to really grasp how the gospel is to work out in his own Christian life, specifically in regard to race relations and his need for approval from others. He then goes on in verses 15-16 to remind him of the gospel. So Paul says that Peter, the great Christian apostle, needs the gospel. If Peter needed it then how much more do we need it?
- One of the most fundamental concepts you must grasp is that the gospel is for Christians as well as non-Christians. Think of Paul's letters.
 - Ephesians is written to the Christians in Ephesus. Paul takes three chapters to talk to these Christians about the gospel and three chapters to apply the gospel to their lives. Romans is the same but Paul takes eleven chapters to talk about the gospel and five chapters to apply it.
 - As one author says, the gospel is not just the ABC's of the Christian life; *"the gospel is the A to Z of the Christian life."*⁷

APPLYING THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO EVERY AREA OF LIFE

- **(SHOW SLIDE 17)** Second, renewal takes place when we apply the power of the gospel to every area of life.
 - Notice that Paul does not say, *"Peter, racism is bad and you need to work harder at following God's anti-racism laws."* He doesn't say, *"Peter, here are three practical tips on how to stop living for the approval of others."* No. He says, *"Peter, you need to connect these issues of your conduct to the life-changing power of the gospel."*
 - So you become a Christian by believing the gospel and then you grow as a Christian by learning how the gospel should work itself out in every area of your life.
- What you discover is that the gospel does not just require changes of behaviour. The gospel also empowers that change. The gospel changes our behaviour by changing the very motivational structures of our hearts.
 - Take racism for instance. Racism is thinking you are superior to someone else based on the resume of your ethnic background. But Paul is saying to Peter and to all of us, *"There can be no racial pride in our hearts for we know that God does not accept anyone based on their ethnic background or skin colour. God welcomes everyone in the same way – through Jesus Christ. So if God welcomes Jews and Gentiles, Chinese and Japanese, Indians and Arabs, and Blacks and Whites on the same basis then you should welcome them as well."*
 - What changes racism are not just laws against racism or even celebration of ethnic diversity but filling our hearts with the gospel that we are justified not by anything in ourselves but in Christ.
 - And remember that the racial issue, for Peter, was grounded in his fear of losing the approval of powerful people. Again, the gospel has the power to renew this area of your life. Paul is saying, *"Peter, through Jesus you are justified before the court of God the Judge. You don't need the approval of these powerful men because you already have the complete approval of the most powerful being in the universe."*
 - Everywhere the Bible does this. We learn how to forgive not by tips on how to forgive but by filling our hearts with the gospel that Christ forgave us (Col 3:13). We learn to care for the poor by filling our hearts with the gospel that Jesus became poor for us so

⁷ Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2015), 9.

that through his poverty we might become rich (2 Cor 8:9). You grow as a Christian by connecting the power of the gospel to every area of life.

- For many Christians the gospel is like a quarter in a vending machine. The quarter is in them. They are Christians and believe the right things. But often the gospel quarter is stuck. It hasn't dropped. Their lives lack security and joy and they are often hypocritical.
 - What do you do when the quarter won't drop in a vending machine? You hit the side of it. Then you hit it again and again until it drops. This is what living the Christian life is all about. This is what Central is all about; namely, helping people to understand the gospel so they receive it into their lives and then getting that gospel quarter to drop so we experience its life changing power in every area of our lives.
- Listen again to Martin Luther: **(SHOW SLIDE 18)** *“I must listen to the Gospel, which teaches me, not what I ought to do (for that is the proper office of the Law), but what Jesus Christ the Son of God has done for me: namely, that he suffered and died to deliver me from sin and death. The Gospel calls me to receive this, and to believe it. And this is the truth of the Gospel. It is also the principal article of all Christian doctrine, in which the knowledge of all godliness consists. It is most necessary, therefore, that we should know this article well, teach it to others, and beat it into their heads continually.”*⁸
 - How right Luther is! We need to constantly hear the gospel for, like Peter, we easily forget it, lose a sense of its wonder, and fail to grasp how it is meant to bring freedom in every area of our lives.
- Gospel renewal is what Christianity is all about. Therefore, gospel renewal is what we strive to make Central all about.
 - This is what every Sunday worship service is about. It is about realigning our lives to the gospel. This is why we say we want every person to be part of a Community Group. Gospel renewal happens in community. Peter was blind to his own faults. He needed Paul to speak into his life and remind him of the gospel. This is why we sponsored a refugee family from Sudan last year and we are about to have a special business meeting to talk about sponsoring another family from Eritrea.
 - It is the gospel that motivates us to be a people committed to prayer, to world missions, to causes of social justice, and to seeing our children and youth raised up to know this good news. What area of life do you need to apply the gospel to? Experience its renewing power.

⁸ Luther, *Commentary on Galatians*, 101.