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Saint Peter illustrated for the Wittenberg Bible
Lucas Cranach the Elder, 1534



Forever Shall Abide

The Letter of Paul to the Galatians

read faithfully with Martin Luther



A Lenten Devotional

Week Two: Galatians 1:11-2:14

But God had seen my wretched state
Before the world's foundation,
And mindful of His mercies great,
He planned for my salvation.
He turned to me a father's heart;
He did not choose the easy part
But gave His dearest treasure.

- Martin Luther
“Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice”

Galatians 1:11-14

“The doctrine of the Gospel takes away all glory, wisdom, righteousness, etc., from men and gives it solely to the Creator, who makes all things out of nothing.”

· Martin Luther

The LCMS's slogan for the 500th Anniversary of the Reformation is right on: It's still all about Jesus.

The letter to the Galatians was written to combat the false teachings of those who would subvert the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Instead of extolling the righteousness of Christ, they were encouraging the Galatians to acquire righteousness by observing elements of the Mosaic Law that had been fulfilled in Jesus and therefore were no longer necessary to keep. Similarly, their claims to authority also rested upon man and not solely on Christ. The opponents of the Gospel appealed to human traditions and their personal connections to the apostles.

With one objection, Paul dismisses doctrinal and authoritative claims of the Gospel's opponents: they are depending upon man rather than on God in Christ. In contrast to them, Paul presents himself as nothing: formerly deceived, a persecutor of the church, sold out in slavery to human traditions and the Mosaic Law. The Gospel he preached was not true because of who Paul is. No, the Gospel is true because it comes from Christ, and if Christ is truly the Son of God, man has no role to play in his salvation.

Nearly 1,500 years after the time of Paul, Luther understood that teachers made the same errors as Paul's opponents in Galatia: They gave man a role in salvation and in teaching authority, failing to give all honor and glory to Christ.

Five hundred years later, we continue to proclaim that salvation is by grace through faith alone in Christ. It's still all about Jesus.

- Rev. Dr. Christopher Jackson

Or pray

Heavenly Father, found our faith on none other than Your beloved son, through whom we pray.

Galatians 2:11-14

“What is all creation in comparison with the doctrine of justification? Therefore if you see this threatened or endangered, do not be afraid to stand up against Peter or an angel from heaven.”

· Martin Luther

The news is often focused on confrontation, especially those who create it and seem to live for it. Much less reported are those who would do anything to avoid an argument. Jesus seems to commend both. In the Sermon on the Mount, He calls the peacemakers blessed. But He also reminds His disciples that the world will hate them for their confrontational commitment to His name. Isaiah calls Jesus the Prince of Peace (Isa 9:6). But Jesus also says He has come not “to bring peace, but a sword” (Matt 10:34).

The Apostle Paul urged Christians to “live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18). Yet he reminds the Galatians that he opposed Cephas publicly and to his face. Paul wasn't upset because Peter offended his sensibilities, because he wore the wrong kind of shirt, or because he didn't thank him properly for his missionary work. He had to oppose Peter because by his actions he rejected the very Good News at the heart of the Christian faith.

Kenny Rogers sang that we need to know when to hold 'em, and know when to fold 'em. People will rub us the wrong way. They may even say things and do things that hurt us deeply. We are all sinners, and offense will be given and taken in this life. But when teachers reject by word or deed the Good News that Jesus has saved us fully and completely by His death on the cross, they must be corrected. It must be done to their face and publicly. If the Gospel is lost, then everything is lost. But when we have the Gospel, then we have everything.

- Rev. Charles St-Onge

Or pray

Merciful Father, hold bright before our eyes our justification in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

"All we aim for is that the glory of God be preserved and the righteousness of faith remain pure and sound. Once this has been established, namely that God alone justifies us solely by His grace through Christ, we are willing not only to bear the pope aloft on our hands but also to kiss his feet. But since we cannot obtain such a confession, we, in turn, become immensely proud in God. On no account should we humble ourselves here."

· Martin Luther

Luther distinguishes between two kinds of pride and humility. One kind of pride we are too familiar with: "My way or the highway." The salutary pride, however, Luther shows us in Paul. This is the unique pride which boasts in the Lord (Gal 6:14).

Similarly, there is a wondrous humility for Christians in striving always to be at peace with everyone (Heb 12:14). But there is a disastrous kind of humility that refuses to stand with God's Word.

Consider the first-century church we see in Galatians. How much humility did it take for Peter, James, and John to watch how Paul's missionary work was changing "their" church, without insisting Paul stop? How easy it would have been for them to tell Paul, "This just isn't how we do it."

On the other side, how much gumption did it take for Paul, conscious of the crimes he had once committed against Christ and the church, to stand up to Peter? How easy would it have been for him to take the back seat, burying some of the talents given him by the Lord?

Thank God the Holy Spirit gave them this balance of humility toward self and pride for the Gospel! This is how brothers dwell together in unity (Ps 133:1). We need the same balance today.

When we would stand up for what we think is right, we first look down and confirm we are standing on the foundation of the prophets and the apostles (Eph 2:20). When we would withdraw to make peace, we first look down to make sure we aren't leaving behind the Gospel.

- Rev. Daniel Guagenti

We pray

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast / Save in the death of Christ, my God; / All the vain things that charm me most, / I sacrifice them to His blood. Amen. (LSB 425)

"Thus Paul abolishes all 'deserving'; he gives the glory only to God, but to himself only confusion. It is as though Paul wanted to say: 'Every gift—whether great or small, whether physical or spiritual—that God intended to give to me, and all the good things that I was ever to do at any time in all my life—all this God had predestined even before I was born, when I could not think, wish, or do anything good.'"

· Martin Luther

Paul here considers his life and his work for a bit, and he admits something rather profound. It's not about him at all. Not in the slightest. It isn't his plan; God set him apart for it. It isn't for his own benefit; the Gospel is to be preached to the Gentiles for their benefit. It isn't for Paul's renown; he doesn't even interact with the big-wigs of the church. Rather, it is all God at work in and through Paul for the sake of the neighbor.

Often we are tempted to make our works the center of our story. See what I have done, so you can know who I am! Paul cuts that off. God's love for Paul in Christ Jesus is Paul's story; everything else just spills out from that. Everything in Paul's life is defined by the love that God has shown to him. Paul is loved by God, and that love that God has even for the Gentiles in Christ Jesus is proclaimed by Paul. Paul's focus is upon what he received from God and what the Gentiles receive from God.

As Christians, our lives are defined not by what we do but by what we receive from God. We have been called out of darkness. We have received the adoption as sons. We have been joined to Christ and His resurrection. Because of all this, we will have life. We will do things—but everything always remains centered on what Christ has done for us.

- Rev. Eric Brown

We pray

Merciful Father, make us mindful of our calling, that we might never boast in our works, but rather rejoice in the salvation Christ has won for us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

Galatians 1:22-24

“Do you not hear that in you there is no doing and no beginning toward becoming pious... God alone begins, furthers, and completes the change.”

· Martin Luther

Does your reputation proceed you? Paul’s certainly did! At first he was known as the bad guy, the man who searched out and sought to destroy God’s faithful people. But then, suddenly, he became known as a good guy, a man who loved the Lord and proclaimed that love to others in word and deed. What brought about this turnaround? We know the story of Paul’s conversion. Luther teaches us that it is God alone—His Holy Spirit working in us—that turns a person’s sinful nature around.

Just like Paul was confronted, when we hear the Law preached to us, our Savior tells us we’re on the wrong road and need to turn around. And like Paul, our eyes are opened when we hear the good news about the love of Christ for us in the Gospel. This change in perspective moves us to want to live for our Lord.

As He did for Paul, the Almighty furthers the change in us. Through the regular hearing of the Word and the administration of His Sacraments, God equips and empowers us to run our race, to live in and to serve Him. Now, we aren’t all called to be globe-trotting missionaries like Paul, but we can follow his example and conduct ourselves in such a manner so that people see Jesus in and through us.

Above all, there is a comfort to be had when we realize that we haven’t measured up to the standards set by Paul. We know that God, who has begun this good change in us, will complete it in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. So to God alone be all the glory.

- Rev. Richard Gizynski

We pray

Dear Lord, help me to proclaim Your love at all times by how I live my life. Amen.

Galatians 2:1-5

“But to attach righteousness, reverence, confidence in salvation, and the fear of death to such things is to attribute divinity to ceremonies.”

· Martin Luther

All created things are good, but they are not gods.

When we hear the word “idolatry,” often we think of bowing down before a carved statue or a painting, rendering physical worship before it. And, to this day, that remains a common form of idolatry. A statue or a painting is a fine thing, but when it is treated as a god rather than a good, that is idolatry.

Of all the good things, the Mosaic Law was good in the utmost. Through it the Israelites would be marked as God’s special people. By it they were led in ways that redound to the wellbeing of their nation. Above all, the Mosaic Law was good in that it foretold and prepared the way of the coming Christ.

However, as good as the Law was, it was and is not God.

The false teachers were attempting to trick the Galatians into believing that their justification depended upon their obedience to the Law. Because of this, Paul would not yield to those who demanded that Timothy should be circumcised. They were trying to put a good in the place of God, to proclaim righteousness through obedience to the Law rather than through the work of Christ in the Gospel.

Human works and ceremonies are good, but they are no foundation for hope, faith, and salvation. Christ, however, is our solid rock.

- Rev. Dr. Christopher Jackson

We pray

Heavenly Father, lead us out of idolatry and into stronger faith in Your Son. Amen.