

False Teachers

by George Verwer

Paul defends his gospel against the criticism of false teachers, who were trying to undermine his authority and add works to faith.

Duration: 52:25

Topics: "False Teachers"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of adapting the message of the gospel to different audiences. He shares a personal experience of encountering a Christian cashier who asked if he was part of the brethren. The speaker emphasizes that the gospel is unchanging, but it can be presented in different ways depending on the cultural context and audience. He warns against the extremes of total rigidity or complete freedom in presenting the gospel, highlighting the need for faithful stewardship of the message.

Transcript

Let's try and get the background to the epistle. Paul has been on his missionary journeys and he's founded churches in such cities as Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, Derby, many of the other cities of Galatia. And they have now become some of the major congregations of this province.

And having established them, he has left them, he has appointed elders, and he has moved on. But as you know, since Paul's visit, false teachers have entered in and they've been troubling the churches. And that's why Paul takes his pen to write this epistle.

So if you're taking notes, let's put the first heading as the false teachers. And we'll look at two things. We'll look at their teaching, what they were actually saying, and then we'll see how they were trying to undermine Paul's personal authority.

First of all, what were these false teachers actually saying? Well, you meet the false teachers in history in Acts chapter 15 and verse 1. Certain men came down from Judea to Antioch teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. That was their teaching, that was their false teaching. Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.

I'm sure you see immediately how their message struck at the very heart of Paul's gospel of justification by faith alone. What they were saying in plain English is that faith in Christ is not enough. It has to be added to.

Faith in Christ is a good thing, I'm sure they would argue. But it's inadequate. There must be the works of the law, there must be the Mosaic customs, and in particular, there must be circumcision.

So that was the teaching of the false teachers. Then let's look secondly at how they sought to undermine Paul's authority. If you read through the six chapters, you'll see that they were constantly trying to do this.

What they were saying was, Paul, you're not one of the twelve. You're not like Peter, you're not like James, you're not like John. They were the three great ones, and the others are much greater than you anyways.

They were actually with Christ. So we're going to find out what they believe. These are the original apostles.

So, that was their false teaching, that's how they sought to undermine Paul. Let's look thirdly at Paul's answer to their criticism of him. Then we'll see how he answers their false teaching.

Firstly, his answer to their personal criticism. If you look at the first verse, you'll see he begins the epistle with the very strongest declaration of his apostleship. It's interesting to compare the opening of Galatians with the opening of all his other epistles.

Let me just give you a quick comparison. To the Romans, this is what he writes. Paul called to be an apostle.

Just that, quite simple. Paul called to be an apostle. This ended here, so we're now going to Session 2. The second part of Session 1 is on another tape.

These are the originals. Galatians Chapter 2. We'll read the whole of the chapter. It really is a very thrilling chapter of Scripture, as in fact is the whole of this epistle.

If you know anything of church history, you'll know the remarkable impact this epistle has had on the church over the years. It was, of course, Martin Luther's great epistle, when he, under God, was instrumental in the reformation of the church. And then when John Wesley was converted in an upstairs room in Aldersgate Street in London, when he walked in after hearing singing, something which would never happen before, he heard singing in an upstairs room and walked in, and the man was not preaching from the Bible, but he was reading the introduction to Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians, just the preface.

And as this man read the preface of Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians, Wesley said, his heart was strangely warm within him. He knew God. He knew Christ for the first time.

So there's a sense in which the epistle to the Galatians is also the basis of the great Methodist movement around the world also. Chapter 2. Fourteen years later, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also.

I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.

Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. We did not give in to them for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. As for those who seemed to be important, whatever they were makes no difference to me.

God does not judge by external appearance. Those men added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they saw that I had been given the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been given the task of preaching the gospel to the Jews.

For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the Jews.

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he was in the wrong. Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles.

But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, you are a Jew yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew.

How is it then that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners know that a man is not justified by observing the law but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we too have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law because by observing the law no one will be justified. If while we seek to be justified in Christ it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not.

If I rebuild what I destroy, I prove that I am a lawbreaker for through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

I do not set aside the grace of God for if righteousness could be gained through the law then Christ died for nothing. Just for those who weren't with us yesterday evening in the first chapter of this epistle we saw Paul challenging the false teachers who were troubling the church or the churches in Galatia. They were preaching that unless a man was circumcised according to the customs taught by Moses he couldn't be saved.

And so they were saying something had to be added to faith in Christ if a man was to be justified. Paul was challenging that false teaching. But it's obvious that the false teachers in turn were challenging Paul.

And we noted in the first chapter that they challenged his authority. They said you're not like James and John and Peter the great men from Jerusalem. And you see in this second chapter that on a number of occasions he speaks about men of repute men who were supposed to be something and he's comparing himself with them.

It appears however that different people in Galatia accused Paul of different things. Apparently some were willing to conceive that he was an apostle. They said alright you did meet Christ on the Damascus road and he did commission you he did give you a gospel to preach but you've talked to too many people and their conversation has tainted the message God gave you and your gospel is now corrupt.

And we saw Paul beginning to deal with this criticism at the end of chapter one. And that's what he continues to do here at the beginning of chapter two. So for those taking notes the first point Paul makes in this chapter is that his gospel is independent of the other apostles.

Paul's gospel independent of the other apostles. You just look back to chapter one and verse sixteen Paul writes there that after God revealed the Lord Jesus to him and called him to preach among the Gentiles he made a deliberate decision. He didn't confer with flesh and blood.

Verse seventeen he didn't go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before him. Instead he went to the Arabian desert and only after three years did he go to Jerusalem and there he met Peter and James before going on to Syria and Cilicia. And then in chapter two and verse one he continues to explain his itinerary.

After fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem. He says it was only after these fourteen years probably fourteen years since his conversion on the Damascus road that finally, verse two he laid before the men of repute in Jerusalem the gospel which he preached among the Gentiles. Now why does Paul go into such detail concerning his travels? Simply to show that he's not the mouthpiece of these other apostles.

He didn't really talk to them about the gospel until he'd been a converted man for fourteen years. He says no, I haven't got my message second hand and my message hasn't been tainted by others. It was the Lord Jesus Christ who gave me this message and it's the pure message today that the Lord Jesus Christ gave me then.

So that's the first argument of chapter two. We saw it last night. My gospel is independent of the other apostles.

But his second argument is that though it's independent it's also identical to the other apostles. That's the second heading. His gospel identical to the other apostles.

Another criticism which in fact was the exact opposite of the first was that rather than being influenced by the other apostles Paul's gospel was entirely different from the other apostles. They were saying, and I quote John Stott the church is being saddled by your action with two gospels Paul's gospel and Peter's gospel and you both claim a divine origin. So the commentators say that Paul's opponents were really getting desperate.

They were going from one extreme to another. Some were saying his gospel had been tainted by these apostles others were saying it's so different from the other apostles that we're now being saddled with two messages. So he wants to make this point that his gospel, though it's independent is identical to what James and John and Peter was preaching.

And he answers this second criticism in a very interesting way. First of all by example and then by teaching. Look first of all at the example and notice that Paul took two companions when he visited Jerusalem.

First of all, verse one he took Barnabas. Now Barnabas was a Jew and his presence in Jerusalem would be quite acceptable to everyone. He would get the right hand of fellowship without question.

But secondly, he took Titus. Now Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile. I want you to get a grip this morning of the drama of these moments.

Here is the real drama of church history. I would suggest to you that we're looking in these opening verses at one of the most critical moments in the history of the Christian church. Here is Paul coming to Jerusalem to explain the gospel he has been preaching to the Gentiles.

And he's taking with him an uncircumcised Gentile. What would the reaction of the apostles be? Would they repudiate Titus because he was uncircumcised? Would they seek to change or to adapt Paul's gospel? This is what John Stott says the issue was. Would the liberty with which Christ has made us free be maintained? Or would the church be condemned by the action of the Jerusalem apostles to bondage and sterility? These were really dramatic days for the Christian church.

So let's look at the outcome. First, the outcome with respect to the presence of Titus. First of all, you see that there certainly was a battle over the issue.

Verses 4 and 5 make that plain. False brethren obviously put the pressure on. They pressured the apostles and maybe Paul himself to circumcise Titus.

But look at verse 5. Tremendous words. To them we did not yield submission even for a moment that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. There's Paul's great desire.

I want to preserve the purity of the gospel for future generations. So the outcome after the battle was, verse 3, Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. The heat of the battle, the scholars tell us, can even be recognized in the grammatical construction of these sentences.

This is what Bishop Lightfoot says. He speaks of the shit-wreck of grammar in these verses. He says Paul is evidently writing under the stress of strong emotion and even considerable embarrassment.

Here was a really hot issue. We think we're dealing with hot issues this week. Nothing as hot as this, I'll assure you.

Was Titus to be accepted as a brother in Christ through faith alone or was there to be the insistence upon him being circumcised? Well, praise God, those Jerusalem apostles accepted him on the basis of faith. But what about the outcome as far as Paul's message was concerned? Look at verse 2. I laid before them, in other words, I explained in detail the gospel I was preaching among the Gentiles. Now you can see in verse 9 exactly whom Paul spoke to at this time.

It was Peter, James, that's the brother of our Lord, and John, the three great apostles in the early days of the church. Now just go back to verse 2 to see why Paul made this visit to Jerusalem. It's very important.

He says, I went up by revelation. So after these 14 years, he went to Jerusalem because God told him to go. It wasn't that he was being called before some kind of great apostolic inquiry.

Peter, James, and John hadn't telegraphed him and said, look, tomorrow be in Jerusalem. There's a committee meeting and we want you to stand before the committee. It wasn't anything like that at all.

God had said to Paul, the time has come. I want you to go to Jerusalem, I want you to meet the apostles, and I want you to place before them the gospel that you're proclaiming. When he explained his gospel to them, verse 6, the outcome was they added nothing to me.

In other words, they accepted without reservation, without adaptation, the gospel which Paul was preaching. This was indeed a great day for the church of Jesus Christ. So that's the second point.

Although his gospel was independent of the apostles, it was absolutely identical to what they were preaching. At this point, I want you to notice something extremely interesting, and it's contained in verses 7 to 10 of the chapter. Although they accepted Paul's gospel, they saw that Paul had a completely different calling from Peter.

Look at verse 7. They saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised. So, although Paul's gospel was identical to that of the other apostles, there was going to be a different emphasis, or different emphases, in the way that he explained and proclaimed that gospel. They wouldn't preach in exactly the same way.

They wouldn't use exactly the same images. They were talking to different kinds of people, and therefore the same gospel would be explained in different ways. This, of course, is the great issue of contextualization.

Our message comes to us as Christians out of this book, comes out of the Bible. But as we turn to the Bible for our message, we are immediately confronted with a great dilemma. On the one hand, the message of the gospel is given to us.

Paul talks about the great reserve of the gospel. It's a given, it's a revealed message. Just like faithful stewards, we are to guard that message.

That's the whole point of Paul's second letter to Timothy. To guard the reserve, the deposit, of the gospel. That which God has given to us, we must guard as faithful stewards.

On the other hand, this gospel is not given to us as a single, neat, mathematical formula. But it's given to us in a rich diversity of formulations. The one gospel is presented in a different number of ways in the scriptures.

So, for example, you have the sacrificial illustration of the gospel, where the Bible speaks of the shedding and sprinkling of Christ's blood. You've got the messianic presentation of the gospel, where the Bible speaks of God's breaking in, his promised rule in the world. You've got the legal presentation of the gospel, God being described as a judge and pronouncing his word against the unrighteous and against sin.

You've got the personal presentation of the gospel, the picture of the Father reconciling his children one by one to himself. You've got the salvific presentation of the gospel, the heavenly liberator, the Lord Jesus Christ, coming to this earth and redeeming, snapping free the chains of those who are in sin. You've got the cosmic presentation of the gospel, the universal Lord claiming universal dominion upon the earth.

There's a rich diversity, that's just a few, of the many ways in which the one gospel is presented in the Bible. So the gospel is something which is given, and yet even in scripture this one given message is culturally adapted to the audience that it's being presented to. Now John Scott says when you begin to

think like this there are two great extremes that you can fall into.

The one he calls total rigidity. Total rigidity. In this case, the evangelist behaves as if God has given a series of precise formulas that you have to repeat more or less word for word.

Certain images that you must invariably employ every time you present the gospel. Now I once worked with an evangelist for 18 months. I spent 18 months of my life with him and he only had seven gospel messages.

And he would go to whatever town, whatever city, and he would preach his seven gospel messages, his one week campaign. We once got invited for 10 days and the guy was in total confusion. That was this man.

He just had seven messages and they were exactly the same every time he spoke whatever the audience was. Total rigidity. Now the opposite of that is total fluidity.

Total fluidity. And John Scott gives the following example. He says, I recently heard an English church leader declare that there's no such thing as the gospel until we enter into the situation where we are to witness.

We take nothing with us into this situation. We discover the gospel only when we have arrived in the situation. Now John Scott says, I'm in full agreement with the need for sensitivity.

But if that was the point this leader was trying to make, he was certainly grossly overstating his case. There is such a thing as a revealed gospel and it's that in every situation which we must proclaim. The great question is which method of proclamation, which of the rich diversity of formulas are we to use in that situation.

So Scott continues, between these two extremes there's a third and a better way. It combines commitment to the fact of revelation with commitment to the task of contextualization. It accepts that only the biblical formulations of the gospel are permanently normative and that every attempt to proclaim the gospel in modern idiom must justify itself as an authentic expression of the biblical gospel.

But if it refuses to jettison the biblical formulations it also refuses to recite them in a wooden and unimaginative way. On the contrary, and I think this is so important, we have to engage in this continuous struggle by prayer, by study, and by discussion. We struggle together.

How can we relate the gospel to the given situation? Since it comes from God we must guard it. Since it is intended for modern men and women we must interpret it. Now this isn't only an international problem.

I would preach this message as much in Britain as I would preach it anywhere else. So the British church has got to decide how it's going to preach the message in a council estate, for example, and how it's going to preach the message in the after-church service in the Oxford Anglican Church where there might be 400 Oxford students listening to the preacher. We've got to think who are our audience and how can we relate the unchanging gospel in an imaginative, meaningful way? This is accepted in the Bible.

Paul and Peter are preaching exactly the same gospel, but the apostles in Jerusalem realised that they're going to present it in different ways because of the difference of their audience. So at this point, a quick summary before we look at the second half of the chapter. Paul is dealing with his critics, remember, and

he says, my gospel hasn't been perverted, it hasn't been distorted by human ideas.

The gospel I'm preaching now is the gospel I received by revelation on the Damascus Road and in the Arabian Desert. However, though it's independent of others, it's identical in content to the gospel that Jerusalem apostles are proclaiming. There's only one gospel, remember chapter 1, you Galatian believers are departing from that one gospel.

But this one gospel will be presented in a variety of ways to different people depending on their situation. Now let's look at the second half of the chapter beginning in verse 11. And the scene moves from Jerusalem to Antioch.

This time, instead of Paul visiting Jerusalem, we've got Peter visiting Antioch. Now the visit to Jerusalem had been a very pleasant affair, the right hand of fellowship had been given to Paul and everyone was happy. But the visit to Antioch was an extremely unpleasant affair.

Paul opposes Peter to his face. He publicly criticizes the great apostle because he says, verse 11, he stood condemned. Now what was the issue which caused this great furor in the early days of the church? Well, verse 12 explains.

Before certain men came from James, came from Jerusalem in other words, Peter ate with the Gentiles. But, when they came, he drew back and he separated himself because he was afraid of the circumcision party. In other words, when Peter first arrived in Antioch, he fully accepted these Gentile believers.

He ate his meals with them, he remembered the Lord Jesus in the breaking of bread with them, and so on. Then this party came from Jerusalem. You read all about it in Acts 15.

These were the people who were teaching that unless a person is circumcised, he can't be saved. And for some reason, Peter was afraid of this group. As you see in verse 12.

It seems that they were teaching that it was improper, improper, for circumcised Jewish believers to eat with uncircumcised Gentiles. So Peter withdrew. He left the table.

In his example, verse 13 was quickly followed by Barnabas. Once again, Paul sees the very truth of the gospel at stake in this action. He takes immediate and dramatic action.

Verse 14, before them all, Paul challenges Peter. If you, though you're a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews? Now let's seek to answer just a couple of questions about this incident. Number one, what was the principle at stake? Well, as we've seen, Paul believed the very truth of the gospel was at stake.

But specifically, you can see from verse 15 onwards, that Paul felt the issue was the basis of justification. Just look at verses 15 and 16. You see how Paul considers Peter's action undermined this doctrine of justification by faith.

In these two verses, he's really saying, Peter, you and I know that a man, whether he's a Jew or a Gentile, is justified, is made acceptable before God, not by works of the law, but through faith in Christ. Now, if God justifies Jews and Gentiles on the same terms, who are you to withhold your fellowship from Gentile believers just because they're uncircumcised? God has accepted them on the basis of faith. So what right have you to reject them just because they aren't circumcised? So you can see that the basic issue of

justification by faith moves on to a secondary issue of fellowship.

It's a very important issue, isn't it? What is the basis of our fellowship together as Christians? On what basis should we welcome people into the Christian fellowship? On what basis should we welcome people around the Lord's table, for example? Now, I was brought up in Brethren Assemblies. I'm sure you're going to be forgiven and put up with that. But I was brought up in Brethren Assemblies.

And there are a variety of Brethren Assemblies. In fact, there's about 13 different stands of Brethren Assemblies in one part of Britain at the present time. My grandfather was a member of one group of Brethren and we were a member of another group.

And he spent the last four or five years of his life in our house. After his wife died, he lived with us. And he would never eat with us.

We had to take his meals up to his bedroom. Because why? Why wouldn't he eat with us? Because the Brethren Assembly where I attended was governed in a different way from the Brethren Assembly that he attended. We believed in the autonomy of the local church.

His group had a central base. He said, on this basis you're not being faithful to Scripture I cannot eat with you. I cannot have any fellowship with you.

I know a little town in Scotland where it's a population of about a thousand people. It's called Gardens Town. Beautiful place.

Right down the bottom of a cliff. And you drive down a road. It's beautiful.

Right through this little town of Gardens Town. As you go down the road, you see four little buildings. Four of them.

And there's exactly the same notice outside each building. The Gospel will be proclaimed each Lord's Day, 6.30. And you go, that means weather permitting. That means weather permitting.

And as you go down the road, they're all identical. All absolutely identical. But there's four of them.

And you begin to think, why are there four? And there's only a thousand people, is it? Why are there four? And I went into a little cafe, restaurant. And on the wall were the following words. Seek ye the Lord while ye may be found.

So I was very encouraged. And on the way out I said to the cashier, very nice to see the word of God being proclaimed. And she said to me, are you a Christian? I said, yes.

And she said, are you in the Brethren? Why, she asked, I do not know. But I said, must be the way I look. She said, yeah.

I said, yes, I'm in the Brethren. And then this is what she said, are you close, very close, or open? An extraordinary question. Are you close, very close, or open? And we got talking, and there are four assemblies in that little town.

One is the open assembly. One is the close assembly. One is the very close assembly.

And one is a group called the tail right assembly. Now what's the basis of difference between these assemblies? You know, if you attend one, you can never attend any of the other three for the rest of your life. Right? So you're going to make a choice early.

What's the basis of difference? The basis of difference is minor, minor, minor. It's got to do with the government of the assembly, and it's got to do with the question of whether Christ could sin. See, some assemblies believe that Christ as a man could sin.

And they marvel, they glory in the fact that this man with the ability to sin throughout his life did not sin. That's crazy, isn't it? Other assemblies believe that's blasphemy. How could the Son of God ever sin? And so, of course, you break over that, don't you? You can't talk to a man who believes that, can you? What nonsense.

This is the issue here in the second chapter of Galatians. On what basis do I fellowship with you? Do I fellowship with you because you're baptized in the same way as I am? Do I fellowship with you even though you're not baptized at all? The only basis of fellowship is justification by faith in Christ alone. If God accepts you, then I must accept you.

Am I not like you? I might think you're the strangest person on the face of the earth, but God has accepted you in Christ and therefore I must accept you too. And you must accept me. Don't forget that, please.

You must accept me because God has also accepted me. That was the issue at stake in Antioch. First of all, it was justification.

Secondly, it was the basis of fellowship. Now the second question. Why did Paul oppose Peter publicly? You're probably familiar with our Lord's teaching in Matthew 18 that if your brother sins against you, what do you do? You go and tell him his fault between you and him alone.

Of course, Peter's sin was not against Paul, was it? It was a public sin. Not only Peter was involved, Barnabas and the rest of the Jews, verse 13, were also involved. Here's another very important principle that you can learn from this incident.

Sometimes people who have sinned publicly must be opposed publicly. Now we find this extremely difficult, but it's nevertheless essential. Sometimes public sin has to be publicly opposed.

John Calvin, commenting on this verse, wrote the following. This example instructs us that those who have sinned publicly must be publicly chastised as far as the church is concerned. The purpose is that their sin may not, by remaining unpunished, serve as a dangerous example to others.

Now Paul's advice a little later to Timothy was as follows. 1 Timothy 5, 20 As for those who are guilty and persist in sin, rebuke and admonish them in the presence of everyone so that the rest might be warned and stand in wholesome awe and fear. Church discipline.

OM team discipline can sometimes be extremely unpleasant. None of us like confrontation, do we? I don't like confrontation. I'm sure none of you like confrontation.

We much prefer peace. Sometimes confrontation is essential. Even public confrontation of a brother or sister in order that the spiritual health of the church the spiritual health of the team might be maintained.

So again, Paul's chief concern in this situation is not to avoid controversy and I hope that's never your chief ambition in life to avoid controversy. Paul's chief ambition is to maintain and uphold the truth of the gospel no matter what personal cost. His concern is to uphold the truth.

The church in every age needs men of similar courage. Men who can discern the truth when the gospel is at stake and are then willing to take a stem if necessary, as Paul did on this occasion, even opposing the great men of their generation. There need to be men whose love for the gospel is far greater than their love for their own personal popularity and reputation.

So that's the second great incident of the chapter. Incident 1 at Jerusalem, Incident 2 at Antioch. Now very quickly just to close, the last few verses Paul deals with the great objection to the foundation doctrine of our faith, the doctrine of justification by faith.

And then just before he puts his pen down to have a cup of tea before moving on to chapter 3, he brings one final devastating criticism against his critics. First of all, the most common criticism of justification by faith. You can see this in verses 17 and 18.

Basically the criticism is that justification by faith is too easy because it leads to moral laxity. The critics say that the doctrine makes Christ the agent of sin. I'm sure you recall that Paul had to deal with a similar situation in Rome.

You remember that astonishing question in Romans 6, verse 1. Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means. How can we who have died to sin still live in it? And that's the answer to the critics, isn't it? How can we who have died to sin still live in it? Or as we have it here in verse 19, I through the law died to the law that I might live to God. Now what is Paul really saying? He's saying when God justifies a man, he doesn't just declare him to be righteous.

But as the tremendous 20th verse puts it the justified person is crucified with Christ. That's part and parcel of justification. It doesn't mean that a man is just legally declared to be righteous.

The moment justification takes place, the process of sanctification begins. A man who is justified dies to the law. He dies to sin.

He begins to live to God. So instead of moral laxity, a man who is truly justified, he has a tremendous desire to be righteous. He has a tremendous though it may well be an increasing desire to be holy.

Now we'll see more of this when we get to chapter 5. The fruit of the Spirit is what? Love, joy, peace and so on. That means the natural spontaneous result when the Holy Spirit is evident in your life is a desire for love, a desire for truth and so on. Always remember then that the evidence of genuine faith is never theoretical.

You are not a Christian because you mentally agree with certain principles. You agree that Christ died for your sin. You agree that you're a sinner.

You agree that you need to repent. You agree that you need to have faith. That doesn't mean you're a Christian.

The fruit of genuine Christianity is that this process of sanctification has begun in your life. There's a desire for holiness. There's a desire for God which was not there before.

As the Lord Jesus put it, by their fruits you shall know them. So there he deals with an objection which obviously the false teachers were bringing against his doctrine. Finally he challenges his critics in this great final verse, the verse I really love greatly.

He shows the utter nonsense of his critics' position. He says if you deny justification by faith, then you nullify the word which means cancel two things. One, you cancel the need for the grace of God.

Two, you cancel the need for the death of Christ. So you see, to say that salvation is by any other means than faith in Christ is to destroy the very foundation of Christianity. Let me put it like this.

If salvation is by work, then it's not by grace. And if it's by our own work, then the work of Jesus Christ was totally unnecessary. So you can see why Paul in chapter one is so strong.

Why he says this is not a different way of looking at the truth. This is a destruction of the truth. If you say you can work your way to God, then it's not the grace of God which is required.

If you say you can work your way to God, then what on earth was the reason for the death of our Lord Jesus Christ? So in this second chapter, Paul takes his argument one step further. He very clearly defines the crucial issue. The crucial issue is the issue of justification by faith.

He shows that though there's a difference between himself and the other apostles, the difference is not in the content of his gospel. It's in the way that he proclaims that gospel because of his audience. He shows that in fact, he is so concerned about the one gospel that he is willing to dramatically oppose even the Apostle Peter in Antioch in order to defend the gospel's truth.

Now tomorrow morning, if you've got the mental energy, I'm not sure that I have, we'll try and look at chapters 3 and 4 of Galatians. Hopefully we'll use the overhead because there's so much in chapters 3 and 4. I assure you it's one of the most complicated sections of the New Testament. I have to confess that when I first read it, I thought Paul had got confused.

And then I remembered that he was inspired and therefore it must be me. It must be me that's confused. But I really had a bash at trying to understand what he was getting at here in chapters 3 and 4. So I pray you'll give your brains a rub before you come tomorrow morning and we'll try and get a grasp of what Paul is up to here in chapters 3 and 4. Let's pray.

Father, we praise you for the courage of this man, the Apostle Paul. We thank you for his love for you and his love for the gospel. And Lord, I have to confess that sometimes I'm more concerned about peace than truth.

I'm more concerned about seemingly good relationships than I am in belief in the truth of God. I ask forgiveness, Lord, for the times when I've chosen peace rather than truth. And Lord, we do pray that you might help us to know a balance in this area.

We know that it's not always right to publicly oppose on every issue. But Lord, give us the wisdom to know just when the truth is at stake, when issues are those upon which we can be flexible, and when issues are those upon which there must be absolutely no movement whatsoever. Grant us a genuine love for your truth, for your gospel.

Grant us great ability, Lord, as we seek to proclaim that truth to the various audiences that we meet from day to day. Lord, we know that we just can't stand up in every street of the world and read the Bible and expect that it will be understood. We need to use our minds, we need to think, how can we make this unchanging message meaningful to the different people of our generation? Give us skill, give us wisdom, make us master craftsmen as we seek to handle your gospel in our day.

Be with us, we pray, in all our discussions today. In the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

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