

## Epoxy

Galatians 2:1-21

Key Verse: 2:15-16

“We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of 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 the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

This is our fourth week in our series on Galatians. As we know from previous weeks, the apostle Paul wrote this letter to the churches in Galatia, the central part of modern-day Turkey, to counteract the influence of a group of Jewish Christians who proclaimed that in addition to the grace of Christ, a Christian must also follow the Law of Moses and be circumcised and abstain from certain foods. There is nothing wrong with being circumcised or not eating certain foods, but these men, called Judaizers, were making these things requirements for salvation. They were in effect saying that God would only be pleased if you accepted Jesus as your savior, and followed the rules and regulations of the Jews. The Judaizers wanted the Gentile, the non-Jewish, Christians to become Jews before coming to God. This shocked Paul, so he wrote this letter to squelch the Judaizer influence in the Galatians churches. The Judaizers said that Paul did not know what he was talking about, in regard to the gospel. They said that they were from the apostles in Jerusalem, that they were from Jesus' original disciples, and that Paul was merely their student. They knew the true way to salvation. In response to this, Paul says that any other gospel that is different than the Gospel of Jesus is not a true gospel and the one preaching it are under God's curse. As for the gospel that Paul preached, he did not learn it from the original disciples, he learned it as a special revelation from Jesus himself. In fact, Paul didn't even go to see the other apostles in Jerusalem until three years after his conversion to Christ. Paul received the gospel independently of the Twelve, but it was still the same gospel.

In today's passage, Paul continues his narrative, picking up fourteen years after meeting Peter and James. “Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain.” (1-2) After seventeen years of preaching the gospel of grace to the Gentiles, the Judaizers came to the churches that Paul had planted. They wanted to enforce circumcision on all the believers. They called Paul a false apostle, a lesser apostle, who was not doing God's full work, but merely laying the foundation. To be a full Christian, they argued, to be fully holy before God, anybody who calls himself a believer would need to be circumcised. When the Judaizers came, Paul wanted to settle this matter once and for all, so he went to Jerusalem to confer with the leaders of the church there. The Jerusalem leaders didn't summon him, but Paul, as he wrote, went in a response to a revelation. Jesus had told him to go and he took Barnabas, his dear coworker in Christ, who had seen the work that was done and Titus a Gentile believer who was not circumcised, but was filled with the Holy Spirit. Paul went to Jerusalem to be sure that he had not been running in vain. Of course, he wasn't running in vain. The power of the gospel was evident in his life and ministry, but Paul wanted to settle the matter and be unified, so he wanted to tell the leaders in Jerusalem what God had been doing among the Gentiles. He wasn't going to argue for the gospel, he was simply going to share the power of the gospel.

The result of this exchange is recorded in the book of Acts chapter 15 and is summarized in verses 6 and 7 here. “As for those who were held in high esteem —whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism —they added nothing to my message. On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of

preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised.” Paul kind of describes the leaders in a disparaging way, but he had to maintain his independence to show that he was not groveling in submission and that Peter and the others were not God, but men. When these men heard what the Lord was doing among the Gentiles, the leaders in Jerusalem had nothing to add. Paul’s gospel was complete and they added nothing to his message. In fact, they realized that Paul had been specially sent to the Gentiles to preach the gospel, just like Peter was specially sent to the Jews to preach the gospel. Their messages were so in tune that the heaviest hitters in Jerusalem, Peter, James, and John, extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. The Judaizers were claiming to come from James and Peter, but Paul says that he had been given the right hand of fellowship from them. Their argument was moot.

It was a great win! There were no other requirements added for salvation. The leaders in Jerusalem did not see it fit to bind the Gentiles with the law. The Holy Spirit had already been working among them. If God said that they were saved, then who is man to add to God? Unfortunately, that was not the end of the discussion. Peter came to Antioch to visit, and when his first arrived, he ate with the Gentiles (12), but when certain men came from Jerusalem, he drew back and separated himself from the Gentiles. To us, eating with someone is not a big deal. We can go to a restaurant and have tons of people eating around us and we don’t care. We don’t even know who they are, but in Paul’s time, eating with someone carried deep meaning or a personal relationship. On top of that, the Jews had dietary regulations to maintain. They couldn’t eat certain things because they were viewed as unclean, but Gentiles didn’t have such restrictions. When Peter came to Antioch, they probably served him bacon-wrapped smoked sausages, sprinkled with brown sugar and baked in the oven for an appetizer and had ham for dinner. To a Jew, that would be the worst meal possible, but Peter ate this unclean food readily with the Gentiles. His salvation through Jesus liberated him from restrictions, but when some Judaizers came, Peter stepped back and refrained eating those bacon-wrapped sausages even though he loved them.

It kind of seems like a minor issue, except for two reasons. The first one is that Peter acted like this because he was afraid. Peter was afraid of the men who came from James. Although he was saved and was filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter still stumbled into sin. It is a pattern that we all fall into. We shouldn’t condemn Peter for his fear; how many times have each of us, who are professing Christians, succumb to our fear and denied our savior? If we do something out of fear, we do something out of sin and not out of the love of God. “There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment.” (1 John 4:18) The other reason that Peter backing away from the Gentiles is an issue is that by his actions, Peter was saying that the Gentiles were less holy and not fully saved. He didn’t say this, but as we like to say, Peter’s actions speak louder than words. Think about it for a moment. Let’s say that Orlando, who is a Marine, just suddenly stopped talking to me when some Marine buddies showed up. I’m an Army brat. My dad served twenty-one years in the Army. Orlando knows that, but he starts keeping his distance because of that. What am I to think, except that he doesn’t think that he should associate with anybody related to the Army? His friends would look down on him because of me because Marines are superior to anyone in the Army. Orlando doesn’t say anything, but his actions do. It would be hurtful in this situation, but in respect to Christ and salvation, it is sin. Not only Peter was guilty, but also it spread to all the Jewish Christians in Antioch, even Barnabas.

In Antioch, in this situation, Paul stood alone and at this moment the gospel could have been lost, but Paul did not back down. "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas 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?'" (14) Paul confronted Peter in front of everybody. Peter had been saved by Jesus' grace, just like the Gentiles, but in his actions, he was leading people not to Christ, but to Jewish culture. Peter should have known better, in Acts 10, Peter receives a vision of a sheet with all kinds of animals on it. A voice tells him to kill and eat, but Peter says, "I have never eaten anything impure or unclean." (Acts 10:14) However the voice responds, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." (Acts 10:15) After the vision, some men from a centurion came to Peter, asking him to come to their master. Peter went to his house and preached the gospel. The centurion and his household accepted it and Holy Spirit came upon them, and Peter was surprised but he got the idea. When the other believers heard about it, they criticized him, but Peter told the story of what happened and said, "So if God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way?" (Acts 11:17)

Some of what was happening during Peter's visit and at the time of Paul writing Galatians is because the church was multicultural. The church started in Judea, in Jerusalem, but it was always God's plan for the Gentiles to be saved through Christ as well. Going all the way back to Genesis, God promised Abraham, "all peoples on earth would be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:3) After the early church was persecuted, it scattered over the Mediterranean region. Paul planted churches throughout Turkey and Greece to a wide variety of places. Each of these places had a different look and feel. As the church grew, the variety of people also grew. You had those who were Jews, who had one set of customs; those from northern Africa, who had another; those who spoke Greek and those who spoke Latin; you had the Romans who respected power, and the Greeks who respected wisdom. The church was composed of an amalgamation of cultures bound together by the common saving grace of Jesus. On any normal day, these groups should not have gotten along, but the gospel united them all. The big problem arose when one group tried to impose one culture over the other cultures. Culture is not universal and the gospel does not elevate one culture above another. On the contrary, one of the most beautiful things about the gospel is that since it originates in God, it transcends all culture.

Like the early church in Paul's time, we too are a multicultural church. All you have to do is look around to see it. When we were having our Easter retreat, there was another group at the camp. One of the leaders came up to me on Saturday after lunch and asked me about our ministry. He was trying to figure out what type of church we were. Were we a black church, a Korean church, a Hispanic church, or a white church? He couldn't tell because we are quite mixed. We are a microcosm of the diversity of the greater church. We have fellow Christians in virtually every nation on the planet. That is a lot of different cultures. With all these cultures, we can celebrate God's grace and give glory to God, or we can create divisions and quarrel amongst our brothers and sisters. That's why we have so many denominations and why many churches were created. People couldn't agree and, in pride, split off. Now, I am not saying that all different churches were created because people couldn't get along. Martin Luther was not trying to break away from the Catholic church, but he wanted to change it and bring it back to focus on the gospel. In the end he left Catholicism because no one was listening to the gospel. However, most of the differences in the churches and denominations are related to how something is done, like the method of baptism, how often communion is taken, the style of dress

for worship, the music that is played, whether someone speaks in tongues or even the language spoken. The Bible is good at showing us what we should do, but it is very silent on how we should do things. The method of worship and proclamation are intentionally not prescribed because these things are not required for salvation and because the body of Christ is to be diverse.

Take a look again at our church. I am certain that there are things about our church that you do not like. There are things that I don't like. I am also certain that there are things that you do like that I don't like and things I like that you don't like. It is natural because we are all different people. God didn't create us as clones of one another. We are a diverse group that grew up in different cultures. There are at least six languages spoken by the people in this room. These differences aren't necessarily a problem, but when we start making some things that we like into requirements for salvation, either intentionally or unintentionally, then we have just added to the gospel of God and told Jesus that he didn't do enough for our salvation. We might think that that would never happen to us and that it happens at other churches, but not here. However, remember that Barnabas was caught up with Peter. Barnabas was Paul's closest brother. He had been a participant in sharing the gospel to the Gentiles. He had seen the power that it had, but he too succumbed to the fear that infected Peter.

In light of all this, Paul reminds Peter of the gospel. "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of 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 the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified. But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be 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 now 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, Christ died for nothing!" (15-21) Paul started out in his rebuke of Peter being sarcastic saying, "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." (15-16) The Jews had lived under the law for over a thousand years, and those who came to faith in Jesus knew how burdensome the law was. These Jews by birth knew the repressive nature of the law and that they were unable to fulfill all of it. These Jews knew that it was Jesus' grace that freed them from the law and truly justified them. The law condemned them, but Jesus' grace redeemed them. It was something that was true for both the Jew and the Gentile.

In the multicultural church of Paul's time, there were many things that were different among the people, but despite it all, it was the gospel that united them into the church. Individual people were from all over the place, but what bound them was the gospel. Paul said, "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 now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (19-20) When we elevate our culture above the gospel, we elevate ourselves above Jesus, but when die with Christ, we do not live, but Christ is the one who lives in us. Our lives stop being about our way of life and start being about Jesus. It is impossible for us not to interpret the gospel through a cultural lens. We are wired to see things based on our culture, but we have to be aware of what is culture and method and what is the core gospel. Culture and method are great for being attractive to a certain

group of people, but it is the gospel that binds and strengthens a church. Some people love singing the hymns, but others feel like the hymns are like funeral marches. Other people prefer contemporary music, but others think that that music is less holy. But what gives us strength, as a church, is not our music, but the gospel.

Carbon fiber reinforced plastic or carbon fiber is a composite material that is comprised of fibers of carbon being embedded in a plastic. These fibers can be of varying size, but they are made of graphite and are very similar to pencil lead. The fibers are tiny and could never become any product by itself. The fibers have no way to bind themselves, but when an epoxy or resin is introduced and cured, the combined material becomes very strong. It is as strong or stronger than steel, but with a fraction of the weight. Carbon fiber is expensive to manufacture but it is used for a variety of applications. High-end golf club shafts and tennis racquet frames use it give strength and low weight to their products. Supercar manufacturers use carbon fiber to strengthen and reduce weight of their cars. And the most extensive use of carbon fiber material is in the Boeing 787, where the fuselage and wings are comprised entirely of carbon fiber, giving the plane the strength to fly and the weight savings to help make it up to 30% more fuel-efficient. What I am getting at is that the gospel is a lot like the epoxy that binds the graphite. With the epoxy, the carbon fibers that could blow away in the wind, if they were left separate, have the strength to lift and airplane into the air. With the gospel binding us together as the church, the earth can be changed.

We like to equate heft with strength. The heavier something is the stronger we think it is, but carbon fiber is very lightweight and appears fragile. However, it can be stronger than steel. In the same way, the gospel of grace can feel lightweight. It seems too simple that Jesus did everything for our salvation. We think that that can't be true; so that's when we start adding things to give it some more heft. Unfortunately, the heft we add does not give strength, but burdens the individual, weighing them down with unnecessary labor. As Paul later writes in 1 Corinthians, the gospel is this, "that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, and then to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:3-6) Jesus died for our sins and rose from the dead on the third day. Jesus did everything for our salvation and there is no more for us to do. This is the simple gospel and it is liberating because God is the power.

In my early days of being a Christian, I was very self-righteous. I prayed everyday before bed and I read three chapters of the Bible everyday, no matter what. There is obviously nothing wrong with those things, but I became proud about my achievements and wondered no one else could do them. I was extra high-minded about it. If people did these things, then they would grow closer to God. I was humbled a number of years ago and am still getting humbled now to show me that although I had a great deal of works, I did not have love and grace. Because of my works and critical nature, I wouldn't lead people to Jesus; I would drive people to fear me and have nothing to do with me. What kind of man of God is that? Thank God that that is not the end. Through this passage, I see the power of the gospel of grace and God has been slowly working in me to become more gracious. I am a work in progress, but I am certain that the gospel of grace has the power to change.

I am certain of this because of the result of Paul's rebuking Peter. It is not mentioned in this passage, but the result is seen in the Bible. After Paul confronted Peter, Peter took the

rebuke to heart and became even more fervent supporter of the gospel. The reason why the gospel unites the church is that when someone rebukes someone else, who wants to follow God, with the gospel of grace, the result is not the fracturing of the church, but repentance in the person who was in error and the restoration of the bonds between them. If there is fighting in the church it is because the eyes of one or more people have been taken off the gospel. The only thing that unites the church is Jesus and peace amongst ourselves is only obtained through his gospel. I said that the Bible gives proof of Peter's repentance. He wrote the book of 1 Peter after the book of Galatians, so after the incident written in Galatians. However, the content of 1 Peter is strikingly similar to what Paul wrote in this letter, in fact 1 Peter is also written in part to the church in Galatia. In it Peter writes, "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. [...] Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:3-5, 8-9)