

I HAVE BEEN CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST

Galatians 2:11-21

Key Verse: 2:20

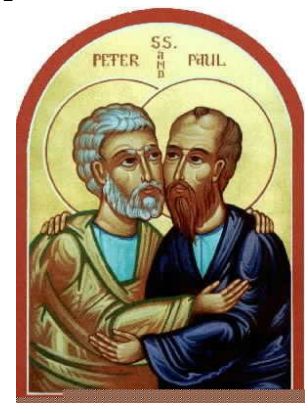
I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

In the first part of Galatians 2, Paul said that he did not give in even for a moment to the pressure to change the gospel of Jesus Christ. Today's passage tells us that it wasn't easy for him to preserve the truth of the gospel. Even the great servants like Peter and Barnabas faltered. We are also challenged today with the pressure to compromise the gospel. The pressure comes from within and without. How can we stand firm to the end? Paul shares what his secret was to live a victorious life of faith and mission. He says, *"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me."* May God help us to learn the Apostle Paul's secret!

I. PETER AND PAUL (11-14)

Look at verse 11. *When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong.* Verse 14 says that Paul rebuked Peter publicly. This was highly unusual--a servant of God opposed another servant of God in front of the congregation. What wrong did Peter do to deserve such a reproach? Paul gives the details in verses 12-14. *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?"*

As we learned last week, Paul had enormous pressure to compromise with the circumcision group that infiltrated the ranks of the believers in Antioch. The false brothers tried to convince the young believers that their faith in Christ was not enough for their salvation. They told them they needed to be circumcised and observe the law of Moses (Ac 15:1). To Paul's great dismay, the Gentile believers were turning their attention to the false teachings. But Paul did not give in for a moment so that the truth of the gospel might remain in them (2:5). He and the leaders in Antioch stood their ground and preserved the true gospel despite the challenges and temptations around them. Then Peter came down from Jerusalem and made things more difficult for them.



At first, Peter had no problem with the Gentile believers in Antioch. Earlier, Peter had had a difficulty in accepting the Gentiles. He was a quintessential Jew. He was

brought up in the Jewish laws and traditions. He wasn't comfortable to be around any Gentile person. But God changed him. While he was praying one day, God showed him in a vision a cornucopia of unclean animals and told him, "Get up, Peter. Kill and eat!" (Ac 10:13) Peter resisted, saying, "But Lord, I am a Jew. I will never eat things like bacon, duck or squid." But God said to him, "Do not call anything impure that God has made clean." This happened three times. This way, God helped Peter to overcome his Judaism in order to grow to be a shepherd for all kinds of people including the Gentiles. Then God sent him to Cornelius, a Roman centurion, and his family. When Peter obeyed and shared the gospel with them, they accepted Jesus as their personal Savior. God baptized them with the Holy Spirit. Peter's heart was moved by this and he said, "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism but accepts men from every nation who fear him and do what is right" (Ac 10:34-35). When the Jerusalem brothers criticized him for eating with the Gentiles, Peter replied, "... if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Ac 11:17)

So when Peter visited the Antioch church, he had no problem with mingling with the Gentile Christians. He had the freedom to have eating fellowships with the people whom he used to avoid like the plague. There was no barrier between them, even though they came from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The eating fellowships were important to them. They showed their mutual acceptance and friendship in the love of Christ. They had joyful time together, as we do in our lunch fellowship after the Sunday worship service.

A problem surfaced when certain men from Jerusalem arrived. Peter began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. He did not want to be seen by the circumcision group that he was eating with the Gentile Christians. He was afraid that they would report him to the Jewish community in Jerusalem that he violated the rules of the Jews. He probably made an excuse that he was sick and could not join the fellowship meal. Then, he went along with the circumcision group to eat in a kosher restaurant. He did not mean to, but he made the Gentile believers feel like they were second-class Christians. By refusing to share the fellowship meals with the Gentile believers, he was telling them that he did not accept them fully as his brothers and sisters in Christ. Peter did not believe in discriminating the Gentile believers, but his action showed he did. It was hypocrisy. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

We learn here that it is one thing to know the truth, but it is another to live the truth in practice. Peter had the truth of the gospel in his heart, but his action was not in line with the truth. We learn that it is not easy to live in line with the truth. Even Peter and Barnabas had a difficulty. We need to examine ourselves and watch what we do and say to see if our lives are in line with the truth of the gospel.

When Paul saw what Peter was doing, he publicly rebuked Peter, saying, "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?” At that time, Paul was one of the leaders in the Antioch church. But Peter was the top disciple of Jesus who had been with Christ from the beginning. Paul knew that. I think it was not easy for Paul to oppose Peter. At least, I don’t think he enjoyed rebuking him publicly. But Paul had no choice. Peter’s hypocrisy was not a trivial matter. It concerned the future of God’s ministry among the Gentiles. Some people may say it was an insignificant matter—what is the big deal about not eating with the Gentile believers? But the matter was very important to Paul. He could see a possible division between the Jewish believers and the Gentile believers within the church. Most of all, it was not right for the church leaders not to accept any believers based on their cultural barriers. Jesus broke down barriers. He went through Samaria to have a deep 1:1 Bible study with a sinful woman. He blessed the faith of a Roman centurion. Peter’s hypocrisy would set a dangerous precedent for believers everywhere. So Paul brought the matter publicly. We believers are one body of Christ. We should not discriminate others based on race or culture.

II. “CHRIST LIVES IN ME” (15-21)

Look at verses 15-16. *“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.”*

Paul uses the term “justified” several times. What does it mean to be justified? In ordinary usage, this word means to be found right or well-grounded, as in “Don’t try to justify his rude behavior.” But in the current context, to be justified means to be declared “not guilty” before God. Paul says that a sinner is justified by faith in Jesus alone. It doesn’t matter whether he is a Jew or a Gentile. A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. By observing the law no one will be justified. Paul was saying, “Cephas, you and I both know that we were saved by faith in Jesus, not by observing the law.”¹

Paul had a personal experience on this which he shares in Romans 7. He had been a devout Pharisee before he met Christ. He kept all the laws and commandments. He fasted regularly and never ate non-kosher food. He did not lie to anyone or cheat anyone. He did not give false testimony against anyone. He prided in himself because he thought he was better than most other Jews, let alone the Gentile pigs. But one thing troubled him in his heart. He got stuck with the 10th commandment: “Do not covet.” He tried very hard not to covet his neighbor who drove a new chariot imported from Rome. He tried not to be envious of his best friend who married a stunning beauty queen. But he couldn’t help himself. The more he tried, the more he was covetous. It seemed that his sinful nature used the law to torture him to death. He wanted to do good before God, but instead, he kept on doing the evil that he didn’t want to do. No one knew about this

¹ Paul does not imply here that the law is bad. On the contrary, the law is useful to us in many ways. It tells us what is right and wrong (Ro 7:12). It convicts us of sin so that we may repent. It tells us to know the grace of Jesus because we cannot observe all the laws 100%. The law cannot save us, but it can be a valuable guide for us.

sin because no one could see what was happening in his mind. Of course, Paul knew that God knew about it. Paul knew that he couldn't go to heaven because he failed to obey this commandment. So he exclaimed, "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" The answer came from Jesus who died on the cross for his sin. He shouted, "Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!" (Ro 7:25) He said in Romans 1:17, "For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."

Look at verse 17. *"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!"* What does Paul mean by this? Some time ago, one of my Bible students told me, "I had expected to have a peace of mind by coming to Bible study, but instead, I am more troubled now." What he meant was that he was more aware of his sins through studying the word of God. The word of God tells us what is right and what is wrong. This is true to those who are justified in Christ. We are born again as new persons when we accept Jesus as our personal Savior and commit our lives to him. We are justified by his blood. This does not mean we become saints over night. We are still sinful. We still sin. In fact, we are more aware of our sins. For example, one young shepherd did not think it was wrong to have one-night stands with women he met in bars. He was even proud of this "scoring." But since he came to know Christ personally, he now knows such a life is wrong before God. Just because we still sin and our sinful nature become evident to us, does that mean Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! Christ does not want us to sin. Jesus said to a sinful woman, "Neither do I condemn you; go now, and sin no more." To Paul, the purpose of the law was to lead him to Christ. He was justified by the grace of God. The law couldn't do it.

Paul says in verses 18-19. *If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.* The circumcision group insisted that Christians observe the Jewish laws and regulations. They said that the grace of Jesus was not enough. They tried to impose the law on top of the grace of Jesus. Paul told them, "The law couldn't save me. I was justified by faith in him. Now, if I go back to the law, it's like rebuilding what I destroyed and I am a lawbreaker." Then he said, "For through the law, I died to the law so that I might live for God." This is a significant statement coming from Paul, a former rabbi and a Pharisee. He had lived for the law. The law had been everything to him. But the law couldn't save him; it only accused him. He was saved by Christ. He died to the law when Jesus died on the cross, bearing all his sins. He said, "I died to the law so that I might live for God." Jesus changed him from the inside through the work of the Holy Spirit. He became a new creation. The law no longer ruled over him. Instead, he lived for God. In Romans 7, Paul testified, "So, my brothers, you also died to the law through the body of Christ, that you might belong to another, to him who was raised from the dead, in order that we might bear fruit to God" (Ro 7:4).



Let us read verse 20. *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.* Two robbers were crucified with Jesus, one on his left and the other on his right. Paul was not one of them. So what does Paul mean when he says he had been crucified with Christ? He says in Romans 6: "...don't you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life" (Ro 6:3-4). Jesus died on the cross bearing all our sins on his shoulders. Our sins died with him and we are no longer condemned. Jesus said, "It is finished." He paid the price of our sins with his own life. When we accept him as our personal Savior and Lord, he and we become one; we are united. We no longer live in the way we used to live. Instead, we live for Christ and we live with him. He lives in us.

This was the secret of Paul's victorious life of faith and mission. He was able to overcome his strong Judaistic background when he welcomed Jesus into his heart. He abandoned Judaism and lived with Christ and for Christ. He was able to preserve the truth of the gospel despite the enormous pressure from his own Jewish brethren. He was a changed man, a new creation in Christ (2Co 5:17). He testified in 1 Timothy: "Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus" (Ti 1:13-14).

Paul also says in verse 20: *The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.* Our daily life is not theoretical. We live in the body. It is real. Our life of faith can be real when we have a personal relationship with Christ, not theoretically but in real terms. Since we are united with Christ who lives in us, we no longer live in the way we used to live. While in the body, we live by faith in Christ, the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. Romans 14:7-8 explains this well. It says, "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

Paul gives his conclusion in verse 21. *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!* By insisting on observing the law, the circumcision group in effect set aside the grace of God. It is because if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die. We should not set aside the wonderful grace of God; instead, let us live by the grace of God.

In today's passage, we learned that all true believers are saved by God's grace alone. There is no difference in terms of human background. It is not easy for us to stand firm on the truth of the gospel as we are challenged to conform to this world. We can live a victorious life of faith and mission, as Paul did, only by coming to Jesus. When we are united with Christ, we can live for him and with him. Only the love of Christ can drive out our fear and empower us to live by the truth (1Jn 4:18).