

The Lord's Message: Made Right by Christ

Date: July 17, 2022

Where: Kronsberg Park

Scripture Reference: Galatians 2:11-21

We are continuing our sermon series Freedom in Christ. This morning we are addressing how we are Made Right by Christ.

When you look at the history of the Church it is filled with many actions that are not Christ-like. The fighting between the Catholic church and the Protestant churches is just one example. Protestants were fighting each other. During John Wesley's day some leaders in the Church of England went so far as to hire thugs to beat up Lay Pastors for preaching about God's kingdom outside of the walls of the church. One of those lay pastors lost their life. If the church is not Christ like in its action, then the question is, "Preacher why should we go to church?" My response is that the church is imperfect because it is made up of imperfect people, but God is perfect and by believing in His Son, Jesus, we are made right by Christ. Our imperfections do not stop the Gospel Message from changing hearts and changing lives, including our own. Because of our imperfections there are many different churches, denominational and non-denominational, throughout the world. People are always trying to understand of what it means to be a Christian. Everybody has a different understanding of how to live for Christ. That is okay until we come to point of thinking that we are at a higher level of Christianity than others. I am better than you because I believe such and such. I am better than you because I do this or that. This triggers human beings to impose rules and regulations that hinder the Gospel Message. This is the point at which our witness for Christ starts to fail.

Let us pray.

This failure is not something that is new to the church today, this is something that has been going on since the beginning of the church. Before Jesus ever ascended to Heaven the disciples were all jockeying for position to be in God's kingdom, **Acts 1:6**. I believe they were asking, Jesus if you are going to restore the kingdom of Israel, what position am I going to have in it. James and John had made this request to Jesus, before Jesus's crucifixion, death, and resurrection, **Mark 10:35-44**. Of course, Jesus's answer did not solve the problem. The question still persists.

Today we pick up with the letter to the people of Galatia, where Paul is writing of a confrontation that Paul had with Peter. Peter is the head of the Apostles. Paul told us last week in this letter that he had spent 15 days in Jerusalem with Peter. They were talking about how the ministry of the Gospel was changing hearts and changing lives in the Gentile regions. At some point Paul must have invited Peter to observe for himself what was happening.

Peter accepted Paul's invitation and Peter saw how the Gospel was changing hearts and lives in Galatia. Peter started to get to know the people. The way to get to know people is by having a meal with them. Everything is going great, **Galatians 2:11-12**. Peter is sharing a meal, and most likely conversation, with the Gentiles that have become believers in Jesus. Then when the "people that came from James" (the Jewish believers in Christ) arrive Peter starts to distance himself from these new (Gentile) believers, because he does not want to appear to be against the Jewish laws.

Can you imagine if a bishop of the United Methodist Church is okay with having a meal with you for some period of time and then a group of pastors show up one day. They tell the bishop that he/she should not be eating a meal with the laity. How would that make you feel? I would say that you would be pretty ticked off.

This is the reason that Paul confronted Peter. Peter was okay with sharing a meal with the new believers, but when the Judaizers showed up, Peter distance himself from them. Peter was setting a status level in Christianity. Paul says it later on in the letter to the Galatians in **Galatians 3:26-28**. There are no status levels in Christianity.

Paul needed to confront Peter, because not only was Peter creating a status level in Christianity, but he was leading others to do the same. Look at **Galatians 2:13**. A leader of any organization always has to be aware of how his or her actions and decisions will affect the entire organization. This occurred in the Methodist Episcopal Church, our founding church. Richard Allen and other African Americans were worshipping at St. George Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1787. They were kneeling at the altar in prayer, when they were pulled and told that they could not pray at the altar because of the color of their skin. They left the church and formed the American Methodist Episcopal Church or AME. That denomination is still thriving today.

Here is Paul confrontation with Peter and others, **Galatians 2:14**. Paul acknowledges that he, Peter, and others were born Jews and not Gentiles, **Galatians 2:15**. In other words, they followed all the Jewish laws and practices. They knew there was a problem. They acknowledged there was a problem with the Jewish laws and practices. Obedience to the law and participation in the religious services did not bring salvation, **Galatians 2:16**. Paul goes on to say that you have all confirmed that the Jewish laws and practices only proved that you were a sinner. If that is the case, then is Jesus a servant of sin? Paul answered that with absolutely not! **(Galatians 2:17)**

Paul makes this argument of why do we want to keep in place that which does not lead us to salvation, i.e. the law and the practices, and force others to follow the same? **(Galatians 2:18)** Paul presents a more excellent way. Maybe we should stop trying to obey the laws and surrender our lives to God, **Galatians 2:19-20**. In other words, we are made right by Christ.

Paul goes on to say if the law could bring salvation, then Jesus died for no purpose, **Galatians 2:21**.

In conclusion, the law does not provide us with salvation. Only in Jesus are we made right with God. All of us are sinners. The payment of sin is death. Jesus came to deliver us from sin to pay the penalty of death, by dying on the cross for us. This we believe. This is Salvation by Faith. We are made right by Christ.

I would like to say that I invite you to join with me in discussions this Fall to discuss where the United Methodist Church stands on sacramental issues, societal issues and organizational issues. Sacramental issues are Holy Communion and Baptism. Societal issues can be homosexuality, abortion, the death penalty and others. Organizational issues are our connectionalism or the trust clause. As a member of the United Methodist Church, you do not have to agree with the church. You can have another opinion and still be a member of the United Methodist Church.

What makes us a Christian? We are made right by Christ. Salvation by Faith. Freedom in Christ. Amen.