

The Promise of Faith  
Second in a Faith Promise Giving Series  
And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God...  
Gal. 2:20  
August 23, 2020

**Prayer** - Show us dear Lord, how your promise of faith is not about doing more and more to earn your grace, but about loving, seeking, and giving more and more to live your grace.

**Message** - Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I hereby call to order case number G.A.L. 2:15-21 the cultural dispute between Jewish believers and Gentile converts. Representatives of today's case are Paul, apostle and church planter of the early church and Peter, apostle and leader of the early church movement. Gentlemen, you may proceed.

Peter - Your honor and members of the jury, I am the apostle Peter and I represent a long line of Jewish believers, the people of Israel. This is a simple misunderstanding with a simple solution. We, as Jewish believers are God's chosen people, Israel. Our Jewish lineage speaks for itself and as it was written in the Biblical Law, the Torah, the first five books of what is now called the Bible, we are chosen by God to God's purpose and we live that purpose by holding to a strict code of behavior, beliefs, and expectations. That is how we ensure our place as God's chosen. That is how we are set apart and marked for God's goodness. We are not about to jeopardize our Jewish heritage by allowing outsiders within what is ours. They who do not know, understand, observe, or honor the laws as we do and have done for centuries. Let them do and believe as they will but we remain the true Israel.

Paul - Your honor and members of the jury, if I may. Paul here - This is *not* a simple misunderstanding between two cultural groups with various backgrounds and religious experience. This is one group deciding for and over another who is in and who is out; who is more and who is less. The misunderstanding is not about groups, biblical law, or how much one does to follow the law. The issue is failure to understand the very essence of why God, through Jesus came, walked among us, taught us, and changed the world.

My colleague Peter seems to have forgotten that. And how dare he speak in such a way that excludes the very people Jesus made a way for - the very people society tends to ignore. He is undermining the very work we started and established in the early church. He is allowing division to creep in and destroy what was planted here in Galatia.

It is no longer about the Biblical Law. It is no longer about holding on to every dot and tittle of the Torah. Jesus was the fulfillment of that law, all of it in every way. There is nothing we as Jewish believers or not, can do to earn our way into God's favor; no rule, code, task, achievement, or accomplishment that will obtain or secure our place with God. Everything that marked us or separated us from others is no more - we are one body, one church, on fellowship. We are marked by a promise of faith.

It's called grace and it is the reason Jesus came when he came, taught what he taught, died when he died, and rose when he rose. It is not about insiders and outsiders. It is not about being separated by and for God, it is and has always been about bringing all God's people back to God - and Jesus did that by being the fulfillment of the biblical law and sacrificing his own life for ours and those to follow.

Judge - thank you gentlemen that will be all. We will take a short recess to allow the jury to deliberate. (pause) As you do however, I ask the jury to consider the following...

Hear these words of Paul, as recorded in a letter written to the church in Galatia. Paul wrote this letter upon hearing there was division among Jewish and Gentile believers and the decision was to let the Jews be Jews and the Gentiles be Gentiles. To that Paul says, no! As believers we are not meant to be divided. The Jesus in me sees the Jesus in you.

Read text: Gal. 2:15-21

On the surface, and had we read the previous 14 verses, it would seem the tension of today's case is centered on the question of whether Jewish and Gentile Christians should eat at the same table - should they share what was called an agape meal together at one table. The heart of matter however, is much deeper. The heart of the matter is not who sits at the table, the heart of the matter is the question: who is God's true Israel? (N.T. Wright) Who is the ultimate insider? Who are the true people of God?

Peter declared it was those whom God chose from the beginning; those who followed the biblical law of Moses and held to the teachings therein. Paul focusses his answer on the most basic point of all. God's true Israel consists of one person: Jesus / the Messiah. He is the faithful one. He is the true Israelite. The question then becomes: who belongs to Jesus? How is that identity expressed? How is one's promise of faith lived out?

For Paul, the answer is related to God's promise to Abraham and Sarah, when they couldn't have children and God told them they would have children upon children; so many, it would outnumber the grains of sand or the stars in the sky. That promise was and is fulfilled in Jesus, the Messiah; The promise that God would create a single worldwide family whose identity marker would be their faith - living a Christ-like faith - living, serving, growing together, caring together in community.

In order for you, the jury, to unpack all that is embedded in this text it is critical to keep in mind three questions: Who set's things right? What role has Jesus played in setting things right? What does the character and truth of life with Jesus look like (regardless of race, gender, political party, work experience, sexual orientation, the size of your paycheck, cultural background, educational level, or religious heritage)? (NIB Vol XI)

In the life of those who believe in God and claim Jesus as Messiah and Lord, the answer to who sets things right is God. God is the one to rectify; put things in order, and make right that which has gone awry. God rectifies his people by coming to their rescue and instituting right order in a world gone wrong. How God does this - leads to question two.

What role has Jesus played? Paul states that we are made right, set in order, brought back into a right relationship through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ. It is not through the strength or purity of our own work ethic or ability to follow all the rules. We do not rectify our relationship with God through our works alone but we are made right through the faithful act of Jesus who gave his life for ours. His promise of faith gave us ours.

What Jesus has done for us is not merely to enable us to believe and thereby find individual forgiveness of sins. His promise of faith, created a whole new world and liberated us from powers that once held us captive. (i.e. powers that kept us separated one from another; powers that divided rather than united, powers that oppressed rather than built up.) You cannot reach a verdict in this case without recognizing the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus and how that in and of itself put to death the old regime (old way of biblical law) and inaugurated (set in motion, established) a new creation.

Third and final question you, the jury, must wrestle with is this: What does the character and truth of a life with and for Jesus look like? What does a promise of faith look like? Paul tells us that "it is no longer I who

live, but Christ who lives in me.” We read in other New Testament writings Jesus’ words, “you abide in me and I abide in you.” In other words, when you say yes to Jesus, it is by divine mystery that God’s Holy Spirit manifests itself in your life through your character, not your list of great works.

The character and truth of a life in Jesus looks like a life transformed - a life lived and given as an instrument of God’s reconciling love; a life lived as a vessel of God’s restoring love. A life of trust - not always knowing the answer or outcome, but trusting God is working for good in all things; God is with us no matter how messy or ugly life gets. How can you be an instrument of God’s reconciling love and be divided among believers? How can you be an instrument of restoring God’s people when you oppress others, or hate someone because of their skin color, who they love, who they vote for, where they live, or whether they have a job or not?

Jury you have perhaps the most significant decision of your life to make, for once you leave this room for deliberation, you are not only deciding for yourself but for believers everywhere - the way you live your life reveals what, how, and who the church will be. The way you live your life, give of yourself and your resources, reveals your decision. Your decision will impact the world.

In today’s world we don’t call ourselves Jewish or Gentile believers but I don’t have to tell you the lines of division among believers are still there. The struggle to identify, embrace and be the true people of God remains.

Perhaps your decision will bring us that much closer to what God had in mind all along.

We are adjourned. Amen

**Sources consulted or sighted:**

William Barclay, DBS Galatians

NIB Vol. XI

N.T. Wright, Paul for Everyone