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St Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> St. SW  
Austin, MN, 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels  
sermon preached on-  
June 16, 2013  
4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: 2 Sam. 11:26-12:10,13-15; Luke 7:36-50

Hymns: 234; 380; 388; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Galatians 2:11-21

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews? 15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the

law died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me. 21 I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, fellow Redeemed

INTRO: Attacks against the truth of God’s Word.

In this world we are surrounded by many attacks against God’s Word. One of the mistakes that can trip people up in their faith is when we try to categorize error as being great or small, important or insignificant. We need to remember that the devil has only one objective in promoting false teaching, and that is to undermine the Christian’s faith in the forgiving grace of God. A common example of a false teaching that appears distant from the gospel is the acceptance by most denominations of theistic evolution as being the true and accurate manner in which the world came into being. Most Christians fail to make the connection between what they see as a question of science (which the modern world supposedly understands so much better than those who lived thousands of years ago) and theology. They fail to recognize how this false teaching changes the whole spiritual truth of how the fall into sin brought death into the world, and how mankind needs to be saved from death because of man’s sin. Death didn’t come into the world as part of God’s creating process. We don’t need to be saved from death because God couldn’t make things right the first time. All was “**very good**” until man sinned, and death came upon all men for all have sinned (Romans 5:12). This truth of how and why we need salvation, and how and why this salvation comes to us is under constant attack. Against these attacks we need to

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**Theme: Remain Steadfast in the Truth of God’s Grace.**

With so many different theological opinions in the world we need to be vigilant, -

## **I. Guarding Ones' Faith from Popular Opinion.**

Social pressure has a far greater influence on us than we may recognize or are willing to admit. It was social pressure that messed with Peter's mind and heart in Antioch. Paul makes mention of this incident not to embarrass Peter, or make some public claim of superiority over Peter, but simply to make the point that we can be swayed far more easily than we might imagine by the behavior and actions of others. This is especially true of the actions of those whom we respect or admire as our superiors in one or another capacity. Peter had come to Antioch where Paul and Barnabas were ministers, and had demonstrated at the beginning of his visit the truth that all were one in Christ. At their fellowship meals Peter had mingled with the gentile Christians, realizing that the laws of separation found in the Mosaic Law were no longer of any effect. But then other Jewish believers came from Jerusalem, and when they made a point of maintaining a separation from the gentiles, seeing them as being ceremonially unclean, Peter was swayed by their behavior, and joined them, separating himself from the gentile brothers. This was hurtful to the fellowship. It introduced artificial distinctions into the group of believers, and made some appear to be inferior to others because of their ethnicity.

But something worse was revealed by their upholding the Old Testament law. Their actions revealed a trust in one's observance of the law for righteousness, supplementing the righteousness of Christ which is ours by faith. This was the concern Paul had for the **Galatian** Christians. There was a growing tendency to believe that one could make one's salvation MORE sure by adding one's own works of righteousness to the righteousness of Christ.

This mixing of the righteousness which comes to us through faith, with the work righteousness of the law is a perversion of the gospel that is particularly appealing to the pride of the flesh. We like to think that the nice things we do for other peoples not

only pleases God, but also makes a difference in our salvation. Our salvation is complete and secure in Christ. Perfect righteousness is found in Him. This righteousness becomes our own through faith which the Holy Spirit works in or faith. Meddling with this truth cannot make our salvation more secure. Quite the contrary is true; it pollutes the gospel and nullifies the grace of God as the only way to life.

But this is the devil's favorite attack on the gospel and believers' faith. The ideas of work righteousness are woven into the fabric of our society, integrated into many different social clubs and organizations. It is not enough for many of these organizations to point out the civic righteousness of their accomplishments, that as a community of citizens we have a responsibility to look out for one another. No, they often take that one extra step, a step too far, claiming merit before God, that people who do such good things, and sacrifice for the good of others must indeed merit eternal salvation.

This is popular opinion, popular also among Christians, appealing also to our flesh. It swayed Peter, and Peter's action swayed Barnabas and others to follow along. It's so easy to think that if we keep the law it's got to add something to our salvation. Against this we need to be regularly immersed in the gospel of Christ, that we might be found -

## **II. Standing Firm in God's Forgiving Grace.**

Paul was quick to point out that even among the Jewish believers, and yes, even among the apostles the one hope of forgiveness and salvation lies with Christ, and Christ alone. We read in verse 16:

**Galatians 2: 16** "Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified."

We are not pronounced innocent by our perfect fulfillment of the law, be it moral, or civil, or religious law. We could never

keep the law perfectly anyway, for we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment! So Paul is right to conclude that **by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified (v.16)**. Judged by the law you could only be found guilty. But thanks be to God -- we are found innocent because of the grace of God, in connection with Christ Jesus. **We believe in Jesus**: we believe that Jesus is the Son of God come down to earth to be our brother. We believe that as our brother He lived under the law, and perfectly fulfilled the law of God in our stead. God credits us with this righteousness of Christ! We believe that Jesus bore our sins, each and every one of our sins, and carried them to the cross, where He bore the curse of God in His sufferings and death. We believe that God was fully satisfied by this redemptive work of Christ, a satisfaction God revealed by raising Jesus from the dead. This is the gospel of Christ which the Spirit of God has placed in our hearts that through faith we might possess the righteousness of God in Him. Through faith we are **justified**, pronounced righteous and holy before God. **We are justified by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus!**

The next step is a careful relating of this grace with the good works that are to be a part of every Christian's life as we proceed in --

### **III. Carrying God's Grace into Daily Life.**

This is where we run into the real measure of God's grace. In response to the grace of God being showered upon us in His love and forgiveness we ought to live lives full of good works, showing our appreciation of God's forgiving grace continually in our lives. But that's not what happens. Instead of living pure and spotless lives to the glory of God, **we sin**. Everyday we fall into sin, sins of thought, word, and deed. Each and every day we think badly of other people, or doubt that God is caring for us as He should. Each and every day of our lives we fail to do all that we ought to do in fulfilling our calling to love God and our neighbor. And yet each and every day God's forgiving grace is there for us. **Where sin abounds grace abounds much more** (Romans 5:20).

In grace God looks upon our feeble and flawed efforts, (and yes they are feeble and flawed, for even our righteous deeds are like filthy rags, [Isaiah 64:6]) but God looks upon them as sacrifices of thanksgiving and love offered to Him for the greatness of His love toward us. This is possible because of the gracious working of the Holy Spirit in our hearts and lives. **God works in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure** (Phil 2:13). The Spirit sanctifies, purifies our works to make them worthy gifts to present to the Lord.

When we do things in an attempt to secure righteousness for ourselves, it is all about **us**, it's all about **ME!** When I have laid hold of the righteousness of Christ through faith, and then seek to fulfill the law of love I have "**died to the law that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me**" (v.19-20).

Christ lives in me. Faith in Christ leads me to do what is right before the Lord, what is kind and good to my neighbor that in all things I might glorify Him who loved me and gave Himself for me. Faith comprehends that sacrifice Christ made for us and our salvation. Faith leads us to respond in love and devotion to our Savior. **Life is no longer about ME.** The good things that I do for others are no longer about ME. **Life is about Christ.** The good things I strive to do everyday are about **Christ** and the **power of His love**, and the **glory of His name**.

So then let us remain steadfast in the truth of God's Grace! **I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain** (v21). That is the stark reality of work righteousness: it sets aside the grace of God as unnecessary, it makes the sacrifice Jesus made upon the cross pointless and unnecessary. However, we live in faith in the grace of God. We are justified through faith. We have peace with God that comes with sins being forgiven. Today as we receive the very body and true blood of our Savior in the Sacrament of the Altar we receive the assurance of God's grace that Jesus has redeemed us, and has come to us with His

forgiving grace. He says to us, **“Go in peace your sins are forgiven.”**

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.