

**Engage the World with the Gospel
Preach the Gospel to Yourself Every Day
Galatians 2:20, 6:14**

Don't you love being here on days when brothers and sisters are welcomed into the covenant community/family of Grace Community Church through baptism? I am always grateful to see men and women and boys and girls publicly state their belief in Jesus! Their baptism is an unequivocal statement of faith in the gospel, an acknowledgement that our only hope for salvation is in Jesus, not in good works or church membership, but, rather, only in confession of sin and a profession of faith in the one who died as a perfect sacrifice for sin. Jesus – God who became man – was the only one eligible to offer his life as a substitute for anyone else because he is the only person who ever kept the law perfectly and who could thus receive God's punishment for the sin of another. Baptism, in fact, is a picture of Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection. We identify with Jesus and he identifies with us at baptism.

Can a person be saved without being baptized? That is like asking if a person can play basketball for a team without wearing a uniform? Why would you? One thing Scripture makes clear: baptism without faith in Jesus' shed blood is meaningless. Another way of saying that is that to be baptized with the understanding that the act of baptism alone is enough to save you is to misunderstand the gospel. Even Martin Luther, who placed much more emphasis than most Protestants on the connection between the sacraments and salvation said that without faith, the sign of baptism means nothing. At the same time, to believe in Jesus without being baptized was unthinkable in the NT.

Today we are going to think about preaching the gospel to ourselves every day. It is, after all, belief in the gospel that is being pictured and affirmed in baptism, and the believer must never forget either

his profession of faith or her baptism, since they are so intertwined in Scripture. In fact, the emphasis in the NT is as much on what you believe as it is on what you believed in the past, one day. We may be tempted to think about our baptism in a wistful way, such as, “Remember that day when I was baptized? I was so nervous being in front of all those people, but it was such a special day.” That is not the purpose of remembering either your profession of faith or your baptism. The purpose is to remember that in believing and through baptism you have been united with Christ through his righteousness and his substitutionary death, burial, and resurrection. In the same way that Jesus identified with sinful human beings when he was baptized in the waters of the Jordan River, polluted with the sins of those who had been baptized before him, so we identify with him and he with us when we are baptized into the church, into the covenant family of God in the baptismal waters. Do not make the mistake of leaving it in the past as a nice memory.

What are the things that are so important to you that you give attention to them every day? I imagine many of you have a weekly workout routine to which you strictly adhere, whether it is 3, 5, or more days per week. Humility prevents me from sharing my regimen with you. Well, humility and the fact that I don’t actually have one! What else is that important to you? Bible reading? Nutritional supplements? Time with your children? Running? Intentionally spending time with those who don’t know Jesus?

How about preaching the gospel to yourself? Do you ever think about that? “Well, I believed the gospel for salvation and I was baptized, but that is in the past. Right now I am focusing on growing as a Christian and obediently serving the Lord.” I like all of that except, “Believing the gospel and baptism are in the past.”

I had planned to preach, today, about the importance of cultivating a heart for the lost, but events of this past week have led me, with the full endorsement of the elders, to preach about the importance of *you* preaching – the gospel. To yourself. Every day. The pure gospel. When you preach the gospel plus anything, you create a false gospel. It is that simple. When you think that the gospel is only a matter of beginning the Christian life, you are open to the deception that Jesus’ death saved you initially, but now you had better obey him or you cannot be saved.

The closer error is to truth, the more dangerous it is. A false gospel that is barely false is still a false gospel – and, it is dangerous! Whenever the Apostle Paul encountered a false gospel, it made him mad. Hopping mad, we would say. That is, in fact, where we find Paul today in the book of Galatians – defending the gospel and encouraging the Galatians to live in the gospel, not to fondly remember it as something in the past that has been superseded by good works of the law. Good works are wrapped up in the gospel, as we shall see, as a result of what God has done for us, but gospel, which, means good news, is a proclamation to believe, not a warning to do good works or else. Good works will always follow the gospel, but “Gospel Plus Good Works Equals Salvation” – is a false gospel.

Our text today is two verses in Galatians – Galatians 2:20 and Galatians 6:14. The first will be familiar to most of you, the latter, maybe not so much. We have to read more than these two verses, though, for context. Galatians, like so many of Paul’s letters, is one long treatise, or, sermon, on the Christian life, so there is nowhere that you can pick up without important information before it or after it. For our time today, we will read Galatians 2:15-21 and Galatians 6:14. It will be obvious that we are picking up the reading in the middle of an argument for the gospel. Let’s get going. Would you please stand for the reading of Scripture?

15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

17 But if, in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life 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 nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

6:14: But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

One more time, let's look at Galatians 2:15-16, then I will make three points that delineate law and gospel. "15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners;

Paul was addressing the reality that the church was made up of Jews and Gentiles. In our day, we would say religious and non-religious. The religious tend to be quite law abiding and very much black and white kind of people while the irreligious are comfortable with a lot more gray in their lives. So, who is in a better position to stand before God, to be justified, to be allowed into his presence? Verse 16 tells us, and it's neither the religious nor the non-religious, but the one who has faith:

16 yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.”

So, it is not our commitment to morality that saves us, although believers ought to be known for their morality. If the reason we pursue morality, however, is so that God will let us into heaven, we have missed the gospel, as taught in Scripture. Three points this morning, beginning with:

1. Living according to the law leads to a life of comparisons

Because, if getting to heaven is dependent on my good works, I need to compare what I do with what others do, right? When Paul said, “We ourselves are Jews by birth, and not Gentile sinners,” he was addressing the sense of birthright entitlement that many Jews assumed was theirs. “Hey, I am not a sinner like those Gentiles – I am a Jew and I live according to God’s law!” Of course, we never hear anything like that today! I doubt you have ever heard something like “I am not a sinner like those radical Muslims – I am an American who believes in God!”

Comparisons. We are big into comparisons, aren’t we? From Olympic medals won by each country to ACC basketball to grades in class to who has the best dog to who has a more righteous cause to who is the best and worst person in the neighborhood. Ultimately, we may assume that there are a certain number of people who get into heaven and we need to be on the right side of the curve. Or, maybe God has scales and he will compare my good works with my bad works, and if the good works win out, I’m in. How can I know if my good works are ascending? Well, I certainly don’t do the kinds of things you do, so I feel pretty good about that! A good Christian would never live the way you do! Or, I am working as

hard as I can for my good cause because I love God, and I love others more than you do. Therefore, God is happy with me, but because you are not doing what I am doing, I regret to inform you that he is not happy with you!

That's "law living." One day, our works will be compared to one man's works – Jesus. How will you do on that day? Remember Galatians 2:16 – God does not say that only a few will be justified by the works of the law – he says that no one will be justified by the works of the law. The gospel plus anything is a false gospel.

It would appear it is remarkably easy for those of us in church to be seduced by a false gospel. Often with other religions, with Christian denominations, with organizations that seek to do good works, and even with cults, it is not the individual tenants of their beliefs that we reject – it is the conclusions they reach when they put all the points together. Any religion or cause that says, "You must believe in Jesus, but you also must do this, this, and this, and you must do them in the way we instruct you, and only then you will be saved," – well, you can see the problem. That's a false gospel.

The pure gospel is simple and is in two basic parts. First, repent of your sin – or, acknowledge that you are the kind of sinner that God says you are and that your sin separates you from your perfect and holy Creator. To repent is to acknowledge your sin before God and cry out for his mercy. Second, believe that when Jesus died on the cross, he was taking God's wrath upon himself for your sin. In fact, your only hope for salvation is for your sin to be transferred to Jesus and for his righteousness to be transferred to you. You cannot earn his favor, you can only repent and believe what God has done for you through Jesus. It is that simple. The gospel is simple, but it is not simplistic, which leads to our second point:

2. Living by the gospel provides freedom to obey God

After all, Paul was frustrated that his opponents accused him of saying it was okay to live any way you want to as long as you are saved. You can see how easy it is for Satan to confuse people about the simplicity of the gospel. We all know that God’s children should desire to please him. In fact, those who follow Jesus almost always possess a deep desire to look and think and act like Jesus! But when I think about the gospel as the starting point and now everything is up to me, I am right back to an attempt to earn God’s favor by what I do. It is a spirit of “Hey, it’s nice that you believe in Jesus, but you better do this and this if you want be saved in the end.” That is very different from someone saying, “Brad, a follower of Jesus surely would want to avoid certain types of behavior and he would love others enough to them in their need.” It is the difference between obedience to God because he has saved you or obedience to God so that you can save yourself, or so that you will be on the right side of history when God separates the sheep from the goats at the end of the age.

You will recall, from our text, in Galatians 2:21: “I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.” Do you get this? If your good works are intended to justify you before God, then it is the same as you saying, “Jesus, I am not really sure why you died because in the end, it is up to me.” *Please* do not stand before the Lord, hoping that you have been good enough to be allowed into heaven! Jesus died for you and if you have believed, he has made you a new person in him, one who wants very much to obey, but out of a heart of gratitude, not a heart of fear. How does that work?

This past Thursday was Australia Day, as I am sure you all knew. Alison, in case you don’t know, is from Australia, so you can bet we knew in our house! Australia Day is a fun day for us and for all Aussies. It is much like our Independence Day on July 4. Thursday

night we attended the Pope Home Group in Buies Creek, where another notable Aussie was in attendance – Jenny Tait. We had an Australian Day Party at the Popes. After eating tons of vegemite – just kidding – after our Aussie dinner, we had Bible study based on last week’s sermon. As is always the case, there was wonderful insight from members of a superbly led group.

Matt Padgett shared something that he had heard Joe Hunziker say in a message that Joe shared with our youth group about life in Christ. Joe, quoting Tim Keller, gave an outstanding description of life in Christ. The gist of the teaching goes like this – many people think that belief in the gospel plus obedience results in the new man. You remember from the message last week how we talked about the battle that rages inside the believer between the Spirit and the flesh, or the old man and the new man. Some say, “If you believe and if you obey, you will have the new man or woman living inside of you.” That is not the biblical order, though. Here is the proper sequence: “Belief in the gospel plus the new man equals obedience.” We obey because Jesus lives in us, and, through the Spirit, we are compelled to obey, not the other way around. We don’t receive the new man because we obey, but, rather, we obey because Jesus lives in us.

That is the point that Paul is making in a verse that is quite familiar to many of you: Galatians 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” So, here is the point – it is not that I do as I should because I want God to like me, but, rather, I die to myself, recognizing that the eternal God of the universe lives in me and as I remember and believe the gospel – that I am nothing and Jesus is everything – then he will live through me. There is a whole lot of dying and a whole lot of living in this verse, and we don’t get the living without the dying, which is where we have been heading all along and is the focus of our last point:

3. Preach the gospel to yourself every day – it will show

We are a people totally consumed with looking good. Here is how it works – “I received way more likes on my Facebook picture than I ever have. I’m on the way up, I tell you.” Or, it may look like this: “I have been convicted about the pettiness of Facebook and I have decided to take a break to focus on what is really important.” Or, “I gave 20 hours this month at the food pantry.” Or, “I told six people about Jesus last month.” Now, you may think that I am mocking good things – I am not, or I certainly don’t intend to. In fact, some of these are true and godly pursuits. But where do you think I came up with these analogies? I am eaten up with promoting self! When I preach the gospel to myself, I am reminded of God’s mercy and grace in my life and I am more likely to do what I do because of the union I enjoy with Jesus. But if I am united with Jesus, I am first united with him in his death, then in his life.

Galatians 6:14, which is Paul’s summary statement in this pointed letter about living in the gospel rather than living by the law: “But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.” When I preach the gospel to myself, I begin to fade and Jesus begins to shine. But the only way that happens is when I boast in the cross of Jesus, or, the understanding that all my righteousness is wrapped up in him. Then, I will not seek to do good or discipline myself to obey or witness to others or devote myself fully to a good cause because I must do it if I am to be accepted by the Lord. No, I will live with godly passion and I will discipline myself to read my Bible because I have taken up my cross and the life of Jesus is flowing through me. I will share Christ because I can do no other. It is not so much that I own the gospel, but that the gospel owns me. Will I please the Lord when I live in the gospel? Yes, I will – but, it will be Jesus living in me that pleases the Father. It will be the Holy

Spirit, the author and illuminator of God's Word, who convicts the hearts of sinners as I share Christ to everyone from the self-righteous moral person to the worst murderer imaginable.

None of us is saved because of our righteousness, nor is any of us condemned because of a specific sin. We are condemned because Adam's sin is part of our nature and when we put our hope in ourselves rather than in Jesus – well, “No one will be justified by the works of the law.” Preach the gospel to yourself every day. Then people will not see you as one trying to do good, but, rather, they will see Jesus. They may be attracted or they may be repulsed, but the gospel will show in your words, attitudes, and actions. Jesus will be exalted in your life. That's the point of this verse. That's the point of preaching the gospel to yourself. It's Jesus. Let's pray.