

Record of Sermons delivered during the month of December 2016

(added progressively after each Sunday)

Galatians – Chapter 2:1-10
A Consultation

(review of last week)

Chapter 2 of Galatians is of crucial importance. It could be called: “Two Historic Meetings” or “A Consultation and a Confrontation”. Today we will consider verses 1-10, the Consultation.

Lets remind ourselves about chapter 1:

Into the young Churches of Galatia, composed of recent converts, had infiltrated false teachers. That can happen even in churches where Apostles have preached! The false teachers were teaching Christianity PLUS, They were saying that it's not enough for you to have faith in the Person and work of Christ. That's not enough to save you. That's necessary but not enough! You must have something more. You must have a PLUS, and the plus that they were teaching was that the men must be circumcised and all of you must submit to the Jewish Ceremonial Laws. If you didn't you could not be saved.

Paul, then, writes to these young Churches who have been carried away by these teachers. He says, “That's not the Gospel. That's a perversion of the Gospel. If people preach anything different from what has been preached they are to be excommunicated. Not even to be recognised as fellow Christians.” Which comes very sharp to the modern 'lovy dovy' age.

“You can know,” he says, “that the Gospel I teach is the true Gospel, because I received it directly from Christ!” Last week we were able to see that he had proved to us that he could never have learned the Gospel from humans. He never learned the Gospel from human lips. He learned the Gospel from the Lord Jesus Christ. None the less we shouldn't fall into this trap: the trap of thinking that because Paul learned his Gospel directly from Christ, that he preached a different Gospel from the other Apostles.

He's now (in Chapter 2) going to show us that although he learned his Gospel that way, he preaches the same Gospel as the other Apostles. He tells us that 14 years after his conversion he met some of the other Apostles and they set their seal of approval upon the Gospel which he was preaching.

Thus there were not two Gospels in the early Church. There was but one!

Look now at verse 1-10 of Chapter 2:

Which we shall call a Consultation. First of all look at who went with Paul to this consultation. There was a Jew, and there was a Gentile. The Jew was Barnabus. The Galatians knew Barnabus because he had been with Paul when the Galatian Churches had been founded. They knew of him and they probably knew Titus, who

was a Gentile (later to be an Elder on Crete). Titus, probably came from the same part of the world as the Galatians, being converted on that same first mission to the Gentiles.

“Anyway,” says Paul. “fourteen years after my conversion, I and Barnabus and Titus. The three of us went up to Jerusalem.” Titus, being a Greek was uncircumcised! And so according to the false teachers, he wasn't saved. What sort of reception would the Apostles in Jerusalem, give – not just to Paul and Barnabus but – to uncircumcised Titus?

“ Don't get the wrong impression,” says Paul, in verse 2, “I wasn't going up to Jerusalem, because like from some distant headmaster, I had been summoned to their study to 'put me on the mat'. I went up to Jerusalem by '*revelation*'. (verse 2) Which means that I went up to Jerusalem because God told me to go! And I didn't go up for a public Synod or a diocesan conference or any other sort of conference. I went up for a private meeting – a consultation – with the Apostles. I went to tell the Apostles what sort of Gospel I had been preaching for the past 14 years.”

Now why did Paul want to tell the Apostles what Gospel he had been preaching for the past 14 years? Was it because he wasn't sure that he was preaching the truth? Well he was perfectly sure because he received his Gospel from Christ. But he needed the Apostles also to recognise that he was preaching the true Gospel, because even 14 years earlier there were already false teachers. If the Apostles could set their seal of approval upon what Paul was preaching, it would save the Gentile Mission. If the rumour was ever able to spread that, Paul preached a different Gospel from that of the Jerusalem Apostles, that would feed ammunition into the hands of those false teachers who were teaching Christianity PLUS.

That's what he means when he says in verse 2: “*in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.*” He didn't want his work amongst the Gentiles to come to nothing. He needed the Apostles to be able to say, “Paul preaches the same Gospel as we do!”

What reception did Titus get? Verse 3: Well the Apostles – note: – the Apostles – they didn't insist that Titus be circumcised. The false teachers in Galatia were saying that unless you are circumcised, you're not saved. Yet these false teachers were none the less claiming that they had the Jerusalem Gospel.

“Oh no!” says Paul, “When I took Titus up to Jerusalem, none of the Apostles insisted that Titus should be circumcised. They did not make that a condition for Christian fellowship! That wasn't part of their teaching about salvation.”

“However,” he says, verse 4, “whenever we had out private consultation together there were certain sham Christians who gate-crashed the consultation. They came in like spies. They worked their way in. Because they wanted to see the 'freedom from Jewish Ceremonial Laws' that we enjoy, brought back into bondage.”

In other words Paul is saying that these Judaisers, who were troubling the Galatian churches, weren't anything new – they had even been active in Jerusalem at that

meeting which Paul is now reporting in his letter.

Here was Paul with Barnabus and Titus talking privately with some of the other Apostles. Others gatecrashed and tried to put pressure on those present to insist that persons should be circumcised before they can be recognised as being saved. But, verse 5 and 6: ⁵*to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.* ⁶*And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.*

We see then that Titus is mentioned as a test case. If circumcision were necessary, the Apostles would have insisted that Titus should be circumcised.

Those Judaisers gatecrashed that meeting and they said that he should and so should everybody else. But Paul and Barnabus and the rest of those Apostles didn't give those false teachers so much as an inch. And as Paul says at the end of verse 6: that those Apostles added nothing to what Paul preached. And so as he has said in verses 5 and 6. *“The truth of the Gospel continued unspoiled: so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*

He had been preaching that faith – and faith in Christ alone – is the means to salvation. These other people said, “No! Plus.” But the Apostles said, “Not true!” Paul, Barnabus and Titus said, “That's not true”. There was unanimous rejection of Christianity PLUS by the people who were the most respected by the Churches.

The outcome of the meeting is told to us in verse 7 to 10: Verse 7. The Jerusalem Apostles recognised that just as Peter had a special commission to preach to the Jews, so Paul had a special commission to preach to the Gentiles. It was recognised – verse 8 – that the God who was at work in Peter, was just as much at work in Paul. It was recognised – verse 9 – that Paul had been given a 'grace' from God – a gift from God. The 'pillars' of the Church recognised it. And the meeting parted amicably by the shaking of hands. The Apostles having said, “You and Barnabus, you go to the Gentiles.” And they shook hands on this basis. Not because there were two separate Gospels, but because it was recognised that they had the same Gospel, which was to be preached in two separate 'fields'.

However says, Paul, “The other Apostles,” verse 10, “they did urge me to do one thing.”

What was it Paul, did the Apostles urge you to circumcise? “No, no, no that wasn't the thing they urged me to do.” What was it then that they urged you to do? “They urged me to remember the poor.”

Paul was being urged to help the poverty stricken – due to a sustained drought – Churches in Judea. They suggested the if the drought free Gentile Christians were to remember the poverty of the generally Jewish Christians, then that would be a way of cementing Fellowship amongst the early Churches. A positive and practical way of encouraging fellowship.

Paul says. “I was keen on the idea. I looked forward to do that.”

As you may know from other studies of the New Testament Paul spent a great deal of time, initiative and labour, organising the collection of funds from Gentile converts to be sent to the Jewish converts. So there wouldn't be a break or even division between Gentile churches and Jewish churches.

So let's summarise the first 10 verses:

Paul, Barnabus and Titus went up to Jerusalem and met James, Peter and John in a private conference. Those Jerusalem Apostles approved the Gospel which Paul preached and added nothing to it. Even though false teachers tried to gatecrash the meeting and force their hand.

Therefore Paul was able to say to the Galatians, "Not only do I reject Christianity PLUS but the Jerusalem Apostles reject Christianity PLUS. The Gospel which I preach was given to me by the Lord Jesus Christ, but it is also the Gospel approved by the Jerusalem Apostles. And they have actually joined with me with a rejection of this Christianity PLUS."

So you see there was only one Gospel, in the early Church. There is only one Gospel. Peter might preach to the Jews and Paul might preach more particularly to the Gentiles, but there's only one Gospel. One Message.

The letters of Peter might have slightly different emphases from the letters of Paul, but they teach the same Gospel. Even with the same author one letter may vary from another because the situation that was being addressed and the persons and personality of the recipients. But only one Gospel. The style of different writers may also be different. But still only one Gospel.

There is only one legitimate Christianity. There is only ONE Apostolic faith. There is not a collection of equally valid but different insights. The new Testament knew nothing of Comprehensiveness. Comprehensiveness is the view that there are lots of different views, that are all equally valid. It is left to you to chose the one or combination of views that you want. Because they're all equally valid. Paul resisted that. Barnabus resisted that and Peter (Cephas) rejected that. James and John resisted that. Out of the private gathering it became patently plain that there's but one Gospel. Every other message, that does not accord with that one Gospel is a perverted Gospel and therefore no Gospel.

So Paul's position is that the truth of that one Gospel must be maintained. Come what may. Certainly we can afford to be conciliatory. To be flexible in many other areas, but when the Gospel is at stake, it is time, like Paul, to stand firm and not budge. Not an hour. Not an inch. ⁵ *to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*

That's what Paul did at Jerusalem and it's what he is doing as he writes the letter to the Galatians.

[And as Martin Luther, carefully studies Paul's letter, he gets for the first time a clear understanding of the Gospel, which had been obscured for a thousand years by Christianity PLUS (of a different kind) which had been cemented into the tradition of the established Western Church at that time.

He no longer wrestled with the impossibility of making his own self generated righteousness acceptable to God. He came to realise the Good News: that it is through faith in the life, work, sacrificial death and glorious resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ ALONE that **God's righteousness** ,by grace, becomes the righteousness of the believing Christian.

And do we also realise the true Gospel? Where do we find it preached faithfully and pure, today? We need to hear Paul's letter just as much, if not more, that the Galatians of 2000 years ago.]

People who love men's souls are not the people going around who are nice to every body. People who love men's souls are not the people who go around afraid to offend. People who love men's souls are not those who believe that everybody is right. People who love men's souls are those who preserve the only truth that can save men's souls. Even when that means being unpleasant and not budging an inch. That's what we learn from that first meeting, which was a Consultation. Next week, the second meeting which was a Confrontation

[2259]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Galatians – Chapter 2:11-16
A Confrontation

(review of last week)

We learnt last week from chapter 2, verses 1-10, of Paul's letter to the Galatians about a special meeting – a Consultation – with the 'pillar' Apostles at the Christian Church in Jerusalem. Mainly James (the Lord's step-brother), Peter and John. This consultation resulted in confirmation that the Gospel, directly revealed to Paul by Christ Himself, and preached by Paul to the Gentiles, was in accord with the Gospel preached by the other Apostles, mainly to the Jews.

Emphasising that there was only one true Gospel. A Gospel that was being preached in different circumstances: to Gentiles by the Apostle, Paul and to Jews by the Jerusalem, Apostles. This one true Gospel, each agreed, was not the Gospel PLUS that was being promoted by the false teachers who in Galatia were disturbing Paul so much that he wrote the very harsh letter to the Christians in the towns of Galatia.

We turn our attention now to verse 11-16 which is the second meeting, of these two historic meetings: not now a Consultation, but a Confrontation.

It's a separate meeting, in a different place and at a different time. It is in fact one of the most tense and dramatic episodes in the Bible. Certainly in the New Testament! Here are two leading Apostles: Peter, Paul. In face-to-face open conflict. Not now at Jerusalem but at Antioch – the city from which Gentile evangelism started. A tremendous contrast from what we read in the first part of Chapter 2.

When Paul visited Jerusalem, Peter gave him the 'right hand of fellowship', but when Peter visited Antioch: Paul 'opposed him to his face'! What led to this? Two Christians. Both Apostles. Both honoured in the churches. Both of them used by God in the conversion of thousands. But here they are having an unhidden, open conflict.

There were two men involved so we'll consider each in turn.

Peter: verse 12. When Peter first arrived at Antioch – he used to travel around visiting and preaching at the churches as we know from the Acts of the Apostles. When he first arrived he used to sit and eat with the Gentile Christians [cf. he and Cornelius]. The verb used in verse 12 is in the imperfect tense which indicates the he kept doing this day after day, week after week, (and if he were there long enough) month after month. He sat down quite happily at the same table as Gentile Christians and shared meals. Perhaps Paul is also alluding to sharing at the Lord's Supper.

Peter's logic we can assume was quite clear. “God has accepted these Gentiles so I accept these Gentiles. They have come to faith in Christ, although they remain uncircumcised and don't observe the Jewish Ceremonial Laws.”

“God has accepted them on the basis of the work of His Son, therefore I accept them.”

And he sat down quite happily and they had Christian fellowship together.

But one day, a group arrived in Antioch from Jerusalem – they came from James. (Not because they had been sent by James, as Acts 15:24 makes clear, but that they claimed to have been from him.) They preached what we are told in Acts 15 verse 1: no salvation without circumcision! And they preached that the Jewish Christians present, as a consequence can't 'sit at table' with such uncircumcised Christians. Those who claim to be Christians but because they are not circumcised, you can't accept them as fellow Christians. As a result, Peter, who up till then had been quite happily 'eating at table' with Gentile Christians: stopped! And refused to eat any more with these Christians but only with Jewish ones.

Why did Peter behave like that? This point needs to be clear.

Was Peter convinced that these Gentiles weren't true Christians? No. It wasn't that long ago he had had that vision that led him to the conversion of Cornelius. A vision – 3 times – not to call, “unclean” what God has called, “clean”! Later, he has said in Cornelius' house, “I see that God has no partiality.” It's very unlikely then that Peter having had these revelations would have now gone back on it. There's no suggestion here, or in any other passage, that Peter had changed his mind. Peter knew very well that uncircumcised, true believers in Christ are as saved as anybody else. So why did he stop eating with them?

The answer in verse 12: *because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group*. He was afraid of the visiting Jews. He gave in to a small but vocal pressure group. He did it out of fear. He knew very well that the Gentiles at Antioch were fellow Christians but he stopped eating with them because of what the Jerusalem visitors would say. That's why the phrase, *acted hypocritically – dissimulation* in KJV – is used in verse 13., Because Peter and the others, who were carried away by his bad example, were acting insincerely. What they knew in their hearts didn't weigh up with the way they were behaving. They yielded to the pressure of these other people. They still believed that these Gentiles were just as much Christians as themselves. But their behaviour didn't square with what they knew in their hearts.

The point especially needs to be made.

Peter hadn't fallen into the trap of denying the Gospel, so we can't treat him as we're told to do in chapter 1:8,9. Anathematise, excommunicate, shun. Have nothing to do with ... Peter hadn't fallen into the trap of denying the Gospel as the ones censured in chapter 1. But what had happened was that he has fallen into the trap of adopting conduct which did deny the Gospel!

To recap: if you were to question Peter you would find that he was still a sincere believer of the Gospel. But if you looked at Peter's behaviour you would find that there were actions in his life, which were a contradiction of the Gospel. He knew that these believers were accepted by God, but he didn't show the same acceptance to them as God showed to them. The result was that lots of other people followed Peter's bad example, even Barnabus, and they refused to accept these Gentiles as fellow

Christians. They knew in their hearts that they were fellow Christians, but their conduct didn't accept them as such.

If Paul hadn't taken his stand that day, two things would have been lost.

1. The truth of the Gospel. Because the impression would have been spread, that you can't accept a person as a fellow Christian unless they have the PLUS . So if Paul hadn't taken his stand that day, the Gospel would have been lost.
2. The second lost would have been the international brotherhood of the Church. If Paul hadn't taken his stand that day you would have had two distinct groups of people, both claiming to be Christians and both having nothing to do with each other.

That was Peter's part in this awful Confrontation. His part was because he was in the wrong -- (verse 11) *he stood condemned*.

Now we look at Paul, because he's the other person who's involved in this Confrontation.

What did Paul do when he saw Peter doing what he did? (verse 11) *But when Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.* And then in verse 14, "*I said to Cephas in front of them all,*"

What Paul did was to precipitate a public showdown. Today that would send a shiver down every 'ecumenical' spine! The very thing that professed Christians today want to avoid at any cost is the very thing that Paul did. He chose to have a public showdown! Because Peter was in the wrong – *condemned* – clearly.

If we look at Galatians we can see that Paul recognised Peter as an Apostle – chapter 1 verse 17. He recognises that Peter has a special mission to the Jews – chapter 2 verse 7. He recognises that Peter is a 'pillar' in Christ's Church – chapter 2 verse 9. So here is a man who is an Apostle, a Jewish Missionary and a pillar in Christ's Church, but he's in the wrong. So because he's in the wrong, who ever he is, and however much he's respected, Paul, *opposed him to his face!* He didn't make any attempt to 'hush it up'. It was a public rebuke. Because, Peter's mistake had caused a public scandal, Paul's rebuke was a public rebuke. It was an open head-on collision.

Just imagine how the World Council of Churches and their lesser bodies [to which the PCA does not belong] would have reported this event. There would have been a vitriolic column telling us that Paul had given way to his short temper. Shown all his maliciousness. Had displayed his great desire for public rows. Couldn't control his tongue. Liked attention and was determined to 'do down' the person who was stealing his limelight. That's the present day interpretation that is likely to be put on this sort of public confrontation.

None of that was true. Paul did, what he did because the Gospel was at stake. Verse 14, he mentions *the truth of the Gospel*. So what is the truth of the Gospel? Look at verse 16: *We ourselves are Jews by birth ... ¹⁶ yet we know that a person is not justified (accepted by God) by the 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 the works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified (accepted by God).

The truth of the Gospel is that the sinner is accepted by God, because of God's grace – kindness. And I'm accepted by God on the basis of nothing else, but the fact that Jesus Christ lived the law, on my behalf, and bore the penalty of the broken law, on my behalf. And so my acceptance by God is dependant entirely on the fact that there is no punishment to fall on me, because it has fallen on Christ, and the righteous character I do not have, Christ has. And this has been reckoned to my account from him. My own works. Anything that I am doesn't come into it. My acceptance by God depends entirely on who Christ is and what Christ has done, and what Christ is doing. My own works don't earn me favour with God, It all comes about due to the Person and works of Christ. That's the Gospel! When people deny, that because all those benefits are made over to me by faith (a further gift of God the Spirit). When people deny that: Paul calls for such people to be **anathematised** (shunned, treated as we would a non-Christian). Chapter 1:8,9.

However, when people still accept the true Gospel, yet deny it by their actions: Paul **opposes them to the face**.

Again be sure of this point: a distinction must be made. If someone denies the Gospel he is to be treated as a non-Christian. Not to be accepted as a 'brother in Christ'. But if someone loves the Gospel, but his actions deny it we are to oppose *them to the face*. We don't deny that he is a Christian. We don't treat him like a non-Christian, but none the less we have a row with him if necessary. As it often will be.

Perhaps someone will wonder how Peter's actions were a denial of the Gospel: he clearly loves the Gospel how would he be accused of denying it? His actions did deny the Gospel. Look at the way Paul speaks to Peter part way through verse 14, then 15 and 16: If you being a Jew – in other words: “You Peter, you don't observe the food regulations any more. You've been eating with Gentiles recently. So how can you impose the ceremonial law on other people. (verse 15) “Peter! Peter, both you and I, we're Jewish believers, but we're both agreed on the basis on which God receives sinners. Who are you to withhold fellowship from the person God has accepted? Who are you to put a further condition on fellowship, when God has not imposed such a condition? Who are you to say, 'Although God has accepted that person I won't accept them'? Who are you to say, that although God has accepted that person I won't accept them until he adopts a certain plus.

That's what Paul was saying. And Paul stood alone! Against the most prominent Christians of the day. Because the truth of the Gospel was at stake.

Notice especially, that Paul stood against fellow believers. If he had not done so, the fellowship of the Christian Church would have been ruined. It is a lie to say that to withstand Christian believers is a breach of fellowship. Because if he had not withstood Christian believers, there would have been a permanent breach of fellowship. It was because Peter and Barnabus and others had already practised a

breach of fellowship, by giving way to pressure from those who wished to apply a PLUS to the Gospel, that Paul had to oppose them. In fact by withstanding them the Christian Church was able to return to its former peace.

The so-called Council of Jerusalem was called and the Gentile Christians were reassured that circumcision wasn't necessary. No other PLUS is necessary. Jews and Gentiles are both accepted by God on the same basis ALONE. The Person and work of Christ.

What saved the day in the first Century was a controversy.

And there have been many since: when Arianism was ruling the world – the Church came to believe that Jesus Christ was not God in the same sense (substance) as the Father, – one man, Athanasius. stood against the world! Such a controversy! But the truth of the Gospel was restored.

At the Reformation. The 'dark ages' had spread through Europe. Mental and Spiritual tyranny! One man, Martin Luther, provoked a controversy, from which the truth about how a sinner is accepted by God was at last restored.

“There is time to precipitate a controversy, to save us,” said Spurgeon in the 19th Century.

Is it now again a time, when to desire an easy peaceful life is to deny the Lord who bought you?

[2433]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Galatians – Chapter 2:15-21
A Summary of the True Gospel (a)

Today's NT reading is a summary of Paul's Gospel.

(review of last week)

So far we have been explaining: although the churches in Galatia had been founded by an Apostle they were being infiltrated by 'false teachers'. Even having been founded by an Apostle, such teachers can have disastrous effects! Even more so today. In Paul's time these teachers had held sway with the recent converts. They had been teaching that 'faith in Christ' is not enough to save you. You must have something else. It's what we've been calling, in this series, Christianity PLUS. The PLUS they were teaching was that while faith in Jesus is necessary, it was also necessary that you become circumcised, fulfil the Jewish ceremonies, and in fact become Jews. That's dangerous, erroneous. It's damning! [As is any other PLUS doctrine, such as was realised by Martin Luther and many others.]

So Paul writes urgently to those Churches in Galatia. And to us.

So far he has said three things, as a result of the way the Galatians had been swayed:

1. If you turn away from the Gospel which the Apostle Paul preached, you are actually turning away from Christ.
2. If anybody preaches any other Gospel, except the Gospel Paul preached, such a person is not to be treated as a fellow Christian.
3. You can have no doubt that the Gospel which Paul preached is the true Gospel. Because he received it directly from Christ; the other Apostles had given their approval of the Gospel he preached; and when one of those Apostles – Peter – had denied, by his actions, the Gospel which Paul preached, when Paul 'opposed him to his face', he was corrected.

Thus everything up to Chapter 2 verse 15 is stressing one point: that the Gospel which Paul preaches is the true Gospel. If you want to know what the true Gospel is, you merely have to examine what Paul preaches. But of course Paul hasn't yet told us what this Gospel is. Not even a summary of the true Gospel. This is what we have now in Chapter 2:15-21. A summary.

There are 5 points to make. All of you who wish to know what the true Gospel is, here is the passage for you. When you understand it, you will have one of the most succinct, condensed, summaries of the Gospel to be found in the New Testament. Remember. If you turn away from this Gospel you have turned away from Christ! If you preach and propagate any other gospel than this Gospel, you're not to be recognised as a Christian.

You may have no doubt however that this is the true Gospel, because the Gospel Paul preached is the one he received from Christ Himself and which the early Apostles validated and approved.

The first of the five points:

1. The message of the Gospel is the message of justification.

As Paul summarises the Gospel, onto the pages of Galatians comes a new word. And if you don't understand this word, you don't understand the Gospel!

Without this word there is no Gospel.

Refer now to verse 16: here you will see, three times, the word, *justified*. And again at verse 17. Also in verse 21 (where it may be translated as righteousness, but the footnote may say, *or justification*). Three times in verse 16; once in 17 and again an equivalent in verse 21.

The Gospel message is the message of justification.

What does that word mean? It's a word taken directly from the law court. In a law court the word condemn will be used. By this we mean: to declare someone guilty. The very opposite of the word, condemn, is the word, justify. Which means to declare someone, not guilty; declare someone innocent; to declare someone, righteous. And it's this word: to declare someone righteous; not guilty; innocent, which is the central word of the Gospel.

Because you know from your own experience, and you know from the Bible, that at least two things are clear: God is righteous and that you are not! Nor am I. There is wrong standing between us and God. There is friction between us and God. The Bible calls this, *enmity*. We are under the sentence of God. We are under the judgement of God.

Because of our unrighteousness and his righteousness, God is angry with us. The Bible used the word: *wrath*, there is an active anger descending from God upon us. We are banished from the presence of God!

But there is an act of undeserved kindness – to use Old English: unmerited favour – by which God puts a sinner right with Himself. He pardons all the sinner's sins and acquits him. God declares him righteous and accepts him into His favour and welcomes him. That being the proof of justification.

How can a sinner be pardoned and accepted? How?

It is that question which the Gospel answers. The Gospel message is the message of *justification*.

2. Now the second point: We notice that Paul clearly states, how a man is NOT justified. Three times in verse 16 you will read the phrase, *the law*. And twice in verse 19 and again in verse 21 you read, *the law*. Six times altogether Paul refers to, *the law*. Now, *the law*, means the total sum of the commandments of God.

Also in verse 16 you will notice that, *the law*, comes in a larger phrase – *the works of the law*.¹ Obedience to the total sum of God's commandments.

The Jews and the 'false teachers' in Galatia – whom we can call – *Judaisers*, they taught that the “works of the law” are the way to be justified. The way for you to be pardoned, and accepted, is by “the works of the law” In other words you can earn your way into the favour of God: by hard work; by toil. By making sure you keep the total sum of God's Commandments. By avoiding everything that God forbids, they say, you can earn your way into the favour of God: keep the 10 Commandments; be circumcised; adopt the Jewish religion; enter the Jewish church; read the Scriptures daily; pray; fast; give alms; fulfil every other religious duty. But if you work at it. I you do the “works of the law”, then if you make the grade God will accept it.

That's what they said. And that by the way is the religion of every ordinary man or woman in the world. That is the religion of every other religion and every moral philosophy in the world. Everybody in the world, except for New Testament Christianity alone, teaches that if you work at it you can make it. You can earn your way into the favour of God.² It's very flattering for man to be told that. Just 'put up your socks a little bit higher'. 'Just try a little bit harder and you can succeed in winning your own salvation', is what they're told. But it's all a fearful delusion. It comes from the greatest liar of all, the 'father' of all lies, who persuades men that this is the truth, when it is not the truth.³

Nobody can keep the whole law of God! Except the One, alone, who did it. God Himself, who came amongst us, as the man Christ Jesus. Nobody else can keep the total sum of God's Commandments. Nobody else has. Nobody else can avoid everything that God forbids, and do with heart and soul everything which God commands. It's astonishing, that the religion of the world is: that you can be justified by the works of the law, but it's specifically denied here! Three times in verse 16 we are told that, that is not the way a man is justified. The Gospel message is the message of justification, but self-justification is not that Gospel message.

3. The third point is: how a man is justified.

How a sinner is pardoned and accepted. Verse 16 ...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 ...*
How is a man justified? Through faith in Christ!

Into the world came the eternal Son of God. He took upon Himself a human

1 The NIV translates – *observing the law* – but the Reformation Study Bible qualifies this with – Literally, “works of the law” and adds: Paul referred specifically to those “works” that distinguish Jews from Gentiles: circumcision, dietary restrictions and Sabbath keeping. His teaching however, extends to all efforts of fallen humanity to earn salvation by good works.

2 A few years ago a group of Presbyterian Ministers visited a Rabbi in his Synagogue. In exchanging religious views, he quite frankly said that (modern, orthodox Jews) uphold the idea of 'doing good and being good'. Another example concerns a 'holocaust survivor' on addressing a group of Jewish children at a holocaust museum, made the observation that Jewish people could have pride in being able to bring about their own salvation by their efforts to be good and to do good; unlike those poor Christians who have it given to them and can have no pride in that,

3 Read chapter 3 of Genesis!

nature. Tempted in every point like we are, in every stage of life, but fully keeping the law, without sin. He did it on behalf of others. To His cross He goes even though He is innocent, spotless and pure, and bears the full punishment of the broken law. And He did it for others!

What is required by me is not to live a perfect life, because another has already lived a perfect life for me. Thank God, what is required of me is not to die a damnable death, because another has already suffered the punishment, which is due to the broken law. What is required of me, is to repent of the life I live in the sight of God and believe that He lives the law, on my behalf. To believe that he died in the place of sinners. What is required of me is to put my whole trust in Jesus Christ. To rest all my hopes of acceptance on what Jesus Christ has done in His life and death and resurrection. What is required of me is not to look into myself, but look out of myself to Jesus Christ. Not by mere intellectual assent, because the word, repent, always means, in the New Testament: committal; embrace; approach; calling for mercy; running for refuge.

A man looks on this Christ who lives perfectly and died as a substitute. He invests all his hopes on this Christ. He runs to this Christ for refuge. He casts himself upon this Christ; embraces this Christ; cries to this Christ: "God be merciful to me a sinner." It's an act of faith! He is justified by means of that faith. That is God's way. Not by the law.

In verse 16 Paul tells this 3 times over:

Once in a general statement: *... a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, ...*

Then, Paul tells it to us again in a personal statement: *... so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, ...* Paul has stated it generally at first and then applies it personally to himself and Peter, saying in effect, 'Look at you and me. I don't rely on the works of the law and neither do you, Peter, we both have faith in Jesus Christ!'

Then he says it again, in an exclusive statement: *... because by works of the law no one will be justified.*

Its hard to believe how the Apostle Paul could put the case more forcibly.

The statement: we are justified by faith – comes from two leading Apostles, because here is Paul talking to Peter saying, *... we know ...* in other words, "both of us know that we are not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ". Then he appeals to the experience that they both share: *... we also have believed ...* . Then thirdly he endorses his own conviction and that of Peter, by an appeal to Scripture, because the last phrase of verse 16 is a quote from Psalm 143:2 *... by works of the law no one will be justified.*⁴

⁴ Paul also makes this referral at Romans 3:20. The direct quote from the Psalm, has been translated: ²*Enter not into judgement*

So the Gospel message is the message of justification; not justification by works, but justification by what Jesus Christ has done – made over to me by faith.⁵ An act of faith.

Now we know how to weigh up a gospel message and thus how to evaluate someone who claims to be a true Gospel preacher. If people do not preach justification by faith (alone) they are not true Gospel preachers.

Further we hasten to add that many attempting-Gospel preachers only preach half the true Gospel. They do not preach that the righteousness of Christ Jesus – lived out in His perfect life – is reckoned to my account. All they preach is that my sins have been reckoned to Christ's account at the Cross. So they tell me how my sin is pardoned, but that's only half the 'good news'. They don't tell me how I can be commended to God, and made acceptable to Him. The other half of the truth of justification is that Christ's righteousness is credited to my account. It's the truth of **imputed** righteousness! That's as much a part of the message of the Gospel as my sin being imputed to His account.⁶ If all Christ did was to die for my sin, there's no hope for me, That leaves me neutral in the eyes of God. But in fact a righteousness has been credited to my account which commends me and makes me acceptable to God. Therefore if people do not preach both Jesus Christ's blood and righteousness, they cannot be said to be true Gospel preachers. *Jesus your blood and righteousness my beauty are, my glorious dress!* – starts the hymn which we will now sing. Number 423. (note in the last verse the *dead* referred to are described in the second line as *those once lost in sin*. That is people still alive on earth, but dead to God in sin, who still have the opportunity, while still on earth, to rejoice at the 'good news' of the true Gospel. Shall we rejoice with them? Pray now that we do.

[2303]

May this understanding of the certainties of God's Word be with all the saints gathered here today.

Next time the remaining two of the five points to be made for Galatians 2:15-21

with your servant, for no one living is righteous before you. See also WCF 16:5

5 No one can keep the law fully; thus legal observances such as circumcision cannot bring about a right relationship with God. Something other than the law is needed to accomplish that, and God has provided it in the gift of Christ's righteousness and the blood of the atonement. Faith however does not merit God's acceptance; it accepts Christ's merit before God.

6 Look back on the many carefully worded phrases in this sermon where this double imputation has been inferred.

It's a Wonderful Life

... everything that does not come from faith is sin.

Romans 14:23b

Many who call themselves Christian and then the majority, generally, in our society hold (perhaps unthinkingly) to, two fatal errors:

That the resurrection of our Lord is not literally true and secondly that people who do good things will go to heaven.

The former of these errors we have referred to already in the preamble to the NT reading.

Let us talk now, about those 'good people'.

Instead of watching TV, while we were touring with the caravan, we had to fall back on a supply of \$2 DVDs which have been in the van for about 4 years, unopened. One of these was a 1946 film about a small American town's hero, George. A 'feel good' movie. It was not very popular at the box office, when released in 1946, although it did receive a number of 'Oscar' nominations. However after its copyright was allowed to lapse, in the early 70s, it was shown on TV regularly at Christmas time. It shared some themes with Dicken's 'A Christmas Carol' – a supernatural intervention that allowed a man to see his past and the effects this had on many others. But George was not a Scrooge. Far from it! He sacrificed his own ambitions to support his family and community. However, through no fault of his own, disaster struck! Everything he had achieved seemed about to be destroyed and he was being labelled as an embezzler.

His 'guardian angel', in response to prayers rising from family, friends, community members and even strangers, was sent: as George was about to throw himself from a bridge over a raging river. George is reminded of the brother he saved from drowning; families he has saved from poverty (caused by the greed of the local property tycoon); his wife saved from spinsterhood etc etc.

In his vision he is returned to the town only to find, that in response to his wish that 'he had never been born', everything is wrong. Over previous decades the town had developed without the benefits of his having lived, there. The seven year old brother he had saved from drowning had not been able to grow up to be the war hero, who saved the lives of thousands of comrades; the town workers were living in slums under the thumb of the tycoon, whose name the town now bore. And so on.

Why mention this film, "It's a Wonderful Life" in a sermon? Why today?

This film, like many things even in our brief life span, (the second half of the Twentieth Century plus a bit) demonstrates the 'thin edge' that causes our Christianity to slide into error. Actually our guard has been down for a much longer time. We find it hard to recognise the seeming small slips down the slope. Just one little bite on that nice juicy fruit. God won't really mind! And the snake said God won't actual carry out His threat. He's a God of love after all! And won't it be great to know everything: the good and even the bad!

Perhaps it's significant that in 1946, in that so called bastion of Christian society, with all its review and revisions and new visions (even 'new perspectives') of what the Christian life and belief should be, that the slide, though already considerable, was not yet as great as in the mid 70s. Perhaps even without realising it the audience of 1946 was uncomfortable about the implications of the otherwise 'feel good' movie, while these scruples had all but disappeared 30 years later. (And even more so now that a further 30 years plus have elapsed.) The point? The point is this. During the film, almost unnoticed, and as a seemingly, insignificant aside – not really relevant to the plot. But, and here is the problem, the aside was treated as nothing of significance. Nothing remarkable. Nothing out of the ordinary. A common expectation, in fact.

The script causes George to say that he is not actually religious! In fact nothing in the story places George in the context of a Christian believer. He's just a 'good person'! None of the 'Wonderful Life' of civic service, concern for others, self sacrifice and general 'good works' was even hinted at being done in the context of loving God first and foremost, and then as a consequence loving and serving others by doing the 'good works' of Christ, at His direction, and in the power of His Holy Spirit in order solely to bring glory to God. Yet the movie was 'feel good'!

In 1946, when religious observance, particularly in America was claimed to be high, the audience was led to 'feel good' about George's Wonderful Life. And even more-so from 1975 onwards, until today, the bulk of Church going Christians – including Western Australian Presbyterians – readily accept, that there are truly 'good people' even if they are not actually true believers. Many would even go further and allow that any form of Worship is pleasing to God and will see us get to heaven. Hindu, Confucian, Moslem, Mormon, money, ambition, self-pride. Anything really. It's all good!

Today (as then, it appears) overwhelming 'good feelings' accompany stories about 'good people' who make a difference in the world around them. If asked whether such people would receive their reward in heaven, most people – including a majority of Christians – would answer “Yes!” “Well of course, we'll all meet again, in heaven, won't we!”

How easily we all fall into convenient (also called liberal) theological thinking. There seems to be no problem with a 'feel good' movie that extols a man's virtue, independent of God. Yet Paul said, “... **everything that does not come from faith is sin.**” (see WCF 16.7)

Christians, by and large, also extol their good works individually and corporately in society, while overlooking their first allegiance to worship God. To love Him with all their heart, mind and strength. We fail to love God first; fail to seriously exercise His prescribed means by which we must grow in Him (Study of His Word, the Sacraments

and Prayer); fail to obey fully His commands; fail to allow Christ to live in us, which makes it possible for us to recognise and do His will; fail to accept the Spirit's strength to allow us to do Christ's works (not ours) in the world.

Yet there are examples of those who carry the name of the Christian Church (one particular, hospital chaplain comes to mind) who when performing a funeral, pander to a mainly non-believing collection of friends and relatives of the deceased with the sentiment that, "Be comforted! We'll all meet again, in heaven".

God is a just God. The absolute example of pure and perfect justice. Our weakened remnant of His image causes us to recognise the "ideal" of justice. As a consequence we are outraged when examples of justice not being done are shown on TV. How much more is the perfect Judge offended. God, to remain the omnipotent creator, must punish sin. We all sin! We all fall dismally short of His requirements, which as Creator He is fully entitled to require. We fall short every day without exception. God's perfect justice demands that the penalty for sin (our disobedience of God) be paid. Left to ourselves then, we all should go to hell. And many will.

God's love is shown, in that He saves those He 'knows' to eternal life and renewed communion with Him. Yet how can a just God do this and remain the one, true, perfectly-righteous God. God shows His love in that, while we were still (and remain) sinners, Christ died for us. And to prove that God's justice was entirely satisfied, Jesus was raised from death.

Here then is His loving formula for our, humanly-speaking, hopeless situation: God Himself (God the Son) took human form with a perfect human nature; offered Himself as the penalty for our sin (He had none) and as proof of His saving love, conquered death, once for all, by rising as the first-born (that is the pre-eminent One) from the dead. And then becomes the model for our future resurrection.

We might recognise that, in the general population of countries, like Australia, Christianity is at best tolerated. Even professing Christians are misled about what happens to 'good people' when they leave this existence. Centuries have elapsed, during which the once well known, understood, protected and aspired to doctrines of God have been eroded away; explained away and done away! We would barely recognise a sincere Christian of the Eighteenth Century today. And they would despair of us! (I remind you of the accuracy and extent of John Wesley mother's grasp of even obscure portions of Scripture that I described previously⁷.)

The watering away of our beliefs to an extent that makes them tolerable to the general population did not start in 1946. It was already well under-way. And today

We hear slogans and book titles such as "When bad things happen to good people?"⁸

⁷ Even in the panic and trauma of a last second rescue of her young son, John, from death in their burning house, Mrs Wesley was known to have quoted an apt phrase from Zachariah Chapter 3: *Is not this a burning stick snatched from the fire* (referring to the high priest Joshua – when being accused by Satan – being saved by the angel of the Lord). How well would one need to know the scriptures for this phrase to come so quickly and naturally to mind at such a time?

⁸ A 1981 book by Harold Kushner, a Conservative rabbi.

and “How can a God of love send [good] people to Hell?”⁹

Both these titles expose the far too ready assumption that many people – even all people, in general – are 'good'. But this is at odds with what God the Creator tells us through His revealed Word, the Bible. He says quite the opposite. “All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God” Rm 3:23. From the third Chapter of Genesis (and then throughout the Bible) we are instructed in the fact that the creature, man, though originally created perfect and in God's image, has fallen away from God's purpose for His creation. Failing in the test of obedience, our 'prime directive' as it were. Mankind (that is all of us, from the beginning, through to everyone today) fell from God's presence and favour, invoking the just penalty of the righteous Creator: death and the corruption of what had, by God's hand alone, been perfect.

Mankind's fatal snatch for equality with God and independence from God's purpose for us, corrupted not only the human race, but all the earth and the other creatures. Bad things in this world do happen (the then Leader of the Federal Opposition, in October 2010, put it a bit more colourfully!). They happen to people. People who by heritage and bondage to their corrupted natures, do not measure up to God's creative intention for them. Bad things do happen. They happen to bad people. That is all of us. An alternative title for Benson's book could be, “How can a just God accept bad people?” And the alternative to Kushner's, “Yet, good things happen to bad people!”

This is the love of God, that through His own action (as the Person of Jesus) through the satisfying of the penalty that His perfect justice requires, He saves His elect (those He 'knows' from before time began) from their sins.

Our sins are devastating in God the father's eyes, but He looks instead at the blameless life of the one and only 'perfect man', Jesus, and covers (clothes) our faults by Christ's righteousness. How can any human creature ignore God's love and prefer instead His justice, His wrath? As damning as our sins are they are fully paid and then covered by the perfect life and righteousness of Jesus Christ. He saves us while we are, and continue to be, sinners.

But there is one sin that is final. Having heard and understood, God's loving formula for salvation: to then reject that love and continue to earn and eventually receive, only the penalty.

Our prayer should constantly be that God's spirit will change the 'heart of stone' and the blinded human nature of us all, that mean we can only reject God's love. Be changed by the Spirit so that we will respond; believe the 'good news' of the saving work of Jesus on the cross; and turn from our sinful intentions. All through, and only by, the power of the Spirit of the risen Christ.

[2013]

Pray God this will be so, for all the saints present today. Amen