

Galatians 2:12-21

¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.

¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.

¹⁴ But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

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 justification¹ were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

“What Paul Really said to Peter”

Sometime in the next year I will have to get off my duff and apply for Canadian citizenship. So, I've been thinking about what it is to be citizen of Canada, indeed Canadian because I'm sure I'll be asked. And, since I've been accused of being a redneck on several occasions, I've pulled out some Foxworthian wisdom: You might be a Canadian if...you understand the phrase "Could you pass me a serviette, I just dropped my poutine, on the chesterfield." You eat chocolate bars, not candy bars. You have Canadian Tire money in your kitchen drawers. You know that Captain Kirk (Bill Shatner) is Canadian and would make an outstanding Governor General. You know that the last letter of the English alphabet is always pronounced "Zed". You know that the four seasons mean: almost winter, winter, still winter and road work. You know that when it's 25 degrees outside, it's a warm day. "Eh?" is a very important part of your vocabulary, and is more polite than "Huh?" You wonder why there isn't a 5 dollar coin, as you can only use more change. You use a red pen on your non-Canadian textbooks and fill in the missing 'u's from labor, honor, and color. You have twins named Wayne and Gretzky. You know what a toque is. Back bacon and Kraft Dinner are two of your favourite food groups. You get milk in bags as well as cartons and...you're not offended by the term "HOMO MILK".

Well, seriously and fortunately, Canadian citizenship is not based on being able to understand Canada. Rather, Citizenship is a covenant. A covenant says, "This is my given circumstance and therefore I will fulfill the requirements necessary to maintain and better this given circumstance." You see, a nation exists to provide for the security and wellbeing of those who live within its realm; therefore, those who live within its realm live according to that nation's constitution which spells out clearly a person's rights and obligations. To be a citizen is then a matter of covenantal fidelity, a bond of trust in which we trust that the nation will ensure our security and wellbeing and the nation trusts that we will live according to our rights and obligations. Well, keep that in mind, while we work our way through this passage from Galatians, particularly the ideas of a covenant being a realm that consists of a bond of trust and fidelity is the way of living within that bond.

So, in this passage from Galatians Paul is recounting an argument he had with Peter in Antioch resulting from an incident when Peter stopped having fellowship with the Gentile Christians in Antioch when some Jewish Christians came up from Jerusalem. These Jerusalem Christians most likely came for the purpose of telling the Gentile Christians in Antioch that they were not fully people of God unless they become Jews by committing to observe Mosaic Law. These Jewish Christians understood that they were now living in the age that the prophets had foretold when God would extend the realm of his covenantal bond of trust with Abraham beyond the physical descendants of Abraham to include peoples of the nations. Yet, they also believed that since Gentiles were being included into the realm of the people of God by God's gracious declaration of adoption into his covenant with Abraham because of the fidelity of Jesus, these adopted Gentiles should also become like faithful Jews, the blood descendants of Abraham, and uphold Mosaic Law. To give you a heads up, Paul is here reprimanding Peter for misunderstanding that it is faith or fidelity exercised within the

covenantal bond of trust that God established with Abraham and which Jesus fulfilled that defines what it is to be one of God's people and not works of the Law.

So, Paul begins his reprimand to Peter by saying, "Yo, Pete. You and me, we're Jews by natural condition. We were born into the family of Abraham, born righteous being born into the people of God. We were not born Gentile 'sinners'." Break, a "sinner" was a derogatory word used for someone either Jew or Gentile who lived not according to Mosaic law. Continuing, "Yo, Pete, you know we are Jews by natural condition and are therefore are in a covenantal bond of trust with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, But by God's grace we have come to know that a person is not put into a right covenantal bond of trust with God by doing what Mosaic Law demands. Pete, Mosaic Law was the outcome of that bond of trust not the means of establishing it. Pete, remember your history here."

Stepping aside for a moment, Jews back then didn't try to earn righteousness or salvation by obeying Mosaic Law. They knew God had established them as righteous by means of his promise, his covenantal bond of trust with Abraham and had proved it by delivering his people out of slavery in Egypt and making them to be a nation. Faithful Jews lived according to the Law of Moses as the grateful expression of God having graciously declared the covenant, "I will be your God, and you will be my people" and proved his faithfulness to it in the Exodus. For Jews, righteousness was freely and graciously established by the declaration of God and proved by his actions (not their own) and Law observance therefore, was nothing more than their grateful and faithful response to God's grace. Let me slap you silly here, even Jews who didn't observe the Law still regarded themselves as righteous, as one of the people of God, simply because of being a descendent of Abraham not because of good Law abiding behaviour..

Back to Paul and Peter, Paul continues, "Yo, Pete; furthermore, we have come to know that a person is put into a right covenantal bond of trust with God with, through, and by means of the fidelity (faithfulness within the realm of the covenantal bond of trust God established with Abraham), the fidelity done by Jesus Christ. And you know Pete, you and me, we've come to have our own fidelity to the covenantal bond of trust God established with Abraham because we are in the covenantal realm of Jesus Christ (united to him by the Holy Spirit) with the result that we might be put into the realm of a right bond of trust with God which has its source and means in the fidelity of Jesus Christ and not by the source and means of our own works of the Law. For, indeed, no flesh shall be put in a right covenantal bond of trust with God by means of works of the Law; i.e., it's impossible. Work with me here, Pete. You and me, we strive to live our right covenantal bond of trust with God, yet even now according to "the Law" we are still sinners. It is impossible to fulfill the requirements of the Law. Therefore, everyone is a sinner. So, does this mean Christ serves sin? Let's not be ridiculous, Pete. If I try to live again according to what I demolished by means of my union with Jesus in the Holy Spirit, I would only be proving myself not simply a sinner, but one who transgresses against God himself."

"Pete, according to the terms of the Law, that one who transgresses the Law is a sinner and the consequence of that is death, I have died so that I might truly live for God and according to his will. You know how? Well, I was crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live. Rather, Christ lives in me. The life I now live in this flesh, I live in the realm of the right covenantal bond of trust established by the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me. Pete, I will not and you should not set aside the grace of God in Christ Jesus by trying to fall back on obeying the Law as the expression of fidelity to the covenant when fidelity with, through, and by means of Jesus Christ and indeed in Jesus Christ is what God has determined to be the appropriate response to his grace. Indeed, Pete, if a right covenantal bond of trust is established with, through, and by means of the Law, then Christ died for nothing." That's where Paul ends the reprimand.

Well, knowing that you're all probably more confused now than you were ten minutes ago on what salvation by grace through faith means and what righteousness is, I'll try to sum up what Paul says he said to Peter. Jesus Christ by his fidelity to the Abrahamic covenant of a bond of trust with God has fulfilled for us what it is to be in a right covenantal bond of trust with God. Truly, Jesus exhibited his fidelity to the utmost by loving us and giving himself up for us, indeed, dying for us on the cross. His death, therefore, has ended the requirements of the Law because he has fulfilled the Law, indeed fulfilled fidelity for us. Moreover, by means of our union to him in the Holy Spirit we have died with him on the cross. And therefore, the Law no longer has any claim on us because we are dead. We are now with, through, and by means of the fidelity of Jesus Christ in a right covenantal bond of trust with God; no strings attached. That's the given to which we gratefully owe a therefore.

So, therefore our new way of fidelity in Christ which is Jesus' own fidelity reckoned to us freely, no strings attached, is not...is not the prideful way of Simon the Pharisee who was quick to point out the moral failures of everybody else rather than be hospitable to the needs of God. Rather, our way is the humility of brokenness exhibited by an unnamed prostitute who wastefully loved Jesus by cleaning his feet with her tears and hair and anointing them

with very expensive perfume simply because she knew that Jesus was the only person ever to have loved her with no strings attached, no judgments. She knew he accepted her, a prostitute, for who she was rather than rejecting her for what she had to do.

If you will allow me to be crude; when it comes to the matter of fidelity we are all prostitutes in one way or another. We have all sold ourselves, our God given abilities off to people and things that we think will give us security and well being rather than to find our well being and security in God and his gracious promise to be our God and we his people; even when we fail to be his people! When Jesus told "that woman" that her faith had saved her, he was telling her that her fidelity to him was her security and wellbeing from here on out. The Good News is that because of Jesus' own fidelity within the covenantal bond of trust that God established with Abraham, God freely welcomes us into a covenantal bond of trust with him where he will provide for our security and wellbeing regardless of our lack of fidelity. Therefore, since God with, through, and by means of Jesus Christ has established this new covenant of grace with us in which it is impossible for us to blow it, go forth in the humility of your brokenness and love extravagantly and wastefully. Amen.