

The Triumph of the Gospel over Approval Galatians 2:11-21

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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."

For two weeks now I've highlighted the problem of approval. I've shown you that the fear of man is a pervasive trap that rears its ugly head in many areas of our lives. I've tried to elevate your awareness of this issue so that you can see how important this subject really is. The first week we laid the groundwork for this series, identifying what the fear of man is and why it is such a trap. Last week we looked at how you start down the path of being an approval junkie by examining how the fear of man is connected to idols of the heart. So I've tried to show the scope and the depth of the problem.

A few of you have asked, "When are you getting to the solution?" That is today, but I will tell you that part of the solution is just being "approval addiction aware." I think that you take great strides by taking a regular look at your heart and asking yourself questions like "who is my god right now?" and "what do I really want?" Further, I think that realizing that the fear of man is really using people to get what I want could also be a liberating moment. In other words, clearly identifying the problem is a critical part of the solution.

But that's not all. Today we are going to take the next step. A friend of mine says, "The power of 'No' is in a stronger 'Yes'", and I think that is what we need to discover here. What I hope to show you is the way in which the gospel and its promises are a fear-defeating "Yes".

Here's my premise or the "Yes-oriented" solution: **Winning the battle over the fear of man comes by treasuring gospel-promises over approval-promises.**

The Brewing Storms of Approval

Now Galatians 2 is not explicitly about the fear of man. Rather, it is about the purity of the gospel. However, the fear of man is all over this story. But in order to understand what is happening here you have to know the background which is found in Acts 10-11.

One of the major tensions for the early church was the relationship between Gentiles and Jews as it related to their union with Christ. The question went like this: "Since Jews were God's chosen people and since the Messiah was Jewish, to what extent must non-Jewish people embrace Judaism in order to be saved?" Additionally there was a question as to what extent the Old Testament laws regarding purity, sacrifices, and even circumcision were still binding after the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus.

Acts 10 is the account of God's decree to Peter that he must preach the gospel to Gentiles and not just Jews. It records the story of Cornelius, a devout Gentile Roman centurion, who receives a vision in which he is told to summon Peter. The next day (10:9) Peter has a vision of blanket full of unclean animals. He is told to kill and eat them. When he refuses (10:14), he is told, "What God has cleansed you must not call common" (10:15). Immediately after his dream, Cornelius' men arrive at his home to take him with them. As Peter enters the house of Cornelius this is what he says, "You know how unlawful it is for a Jewish man to keep company or to go to one of another nation. But God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (10:28). So you can see the tension. Peter is told by God to do something that seems to contradict long-standing tradition. The visit to Cornelius resulted in people coming under the influence of the Holy Spirit, and Peter baptized them (Acts 10:44-48).

In chapter 11 we see the effects of this visit; it was not well received by everyone who heard it. When Peter came to Jerusalem, his fellow Jews confronted him.

"Now the apostles and brethren who were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God. And when Peter came up to Jerusalem, those of the circumcision contended with him, saying, "You went in to uncircumcised men and ate with them!" (Acts 11:1-3)

Now Peter explained it to them (see 11:4-18), and it seems that the leaders were persuaded.

This story is important because it gives you a picture of the background of what is happening in Galatians 2. There is a major tension as to whether or not Gentiles can truly be saved without becoming Jews.

The Gospel/Approval Crisis in Antioch

There is more to this story and it connects two cities: Jerusalem and Antioch. This racial-religious-tradition was primarily based in the city of Jerusalem since it was the center of Judaism. Antioch held a special place because this church was on the cutting edge of the gospel expansion, and it involved a major movement among the Gentiles. This church was one of the first to truly live out the gospel in a non-Jewish context.

We learn from Acts 11:22 that Barnabas was dispatched from Jerusalem to investigate and encourage the church. Eventually (according to Acts 11:25) Paul served there with Barnabas for a year. This was a thriving ministry, and it is identified as the first place where people were called Christians.

Now back to Galatians 2. The conflict between Peter and Paul in our text today is set in the church at Antioch. Let me give you the highlights. Apparently Peter came for a visit to Antioch (v 11), and it was his practice while he was there to eat with Gentiles (v 12). Then certain men from James came to visit Antioch which then caused Peter to change his practice of eating with the Gentiles during their visit (vs 12). The result was that the rest of the Jews and Barnabas went along with him (vs 14). Then Paul confronts Peter and all of them because they were not being straight forward with the gospel (vs 14).

What is amazing to me about what happens next is that Paul doesn't just call them out for inconsistency; he brings the gospel to bear on this situation. The climax of his rebuke is found in 2:20.

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me."

This verse says three things: 1) I died with Christ, 2) Christ lives in me, and 3) I live by faith in this reality. Notice that to attack Peter's fear of man and his hypocritical actions, he points everyone back to the gospel.

What do I mean by the Gospel?

I don't want to assume that you know what I mean by the gospel so let me take a minute and review with you what I mean by the gospel. A while ago I wrote four paragraphs to try and capture what the gospel really means. I wanted it to be clear and brief.

There is a triune God who is both creator of everything (Gen 1:1) and infinitely holy (Is. 6:3). Human beings are natural born sinners (Rom. 3:10-11), violate God's law (James 2:10), and face death (Rom. 6:23) and judgment in Hell (Mt 25:30-46) from a righteous God because of our passive and active depravity. Self-atonement is impossible since every sacrifice would be tainted by our sinfulness (Is 64:6). In ourselves there is no hope for reconciliation with a holy God (Eph 2:12).

But the good news of the Bible is that the second person of the Trinity became a man (John 1:14); his name is Jesus (Mt 1:21), and he lived a perfect, sinless life (Heb. 4:15). He was undeservedly executed on a cross (Mt 27:35), experienced immense shame and painful separation from the Father (Mt. 27:46), personally bore the punishment for the sins of all who would put their trust in Him (John 1:12), and rose again from the grave (1 Cor. 15:20), conquering the power and curse of sin (1 Cor. 15:57) and declaring, once and for all, that He is Lord (Acts 2:36).

The good news of the Bible is that a holy God has made a way to be forgiven (1 John 1:9), to be changed from the inside out (2 Cor. 5:17), and to be brought back into a right relationship with the Creator (Eph. 2:13). And for those who put their faith in Jesus (Eph. 2:8), repent of their sins (Acts 2:38), and follow Christ (Rom. 10:9-10), the Father counts Jesus' death as sufficient for them (Eph 2:14) since through Christ the Father adopts them (Rom. 8:15) and grants complete, imputed righteousness (Rom 8:1).

The good news of the Bible is that based upon the finished work of Jesus a holy God can forgive me (Col. 1:14), be satisfied with me (Eph 2:4), change me (Eph. 4:24), and grant me eternal fellowship with my Creator (Rev 21:3).

This is what it means to be saved. This is the message of the Bible. This is the gospel. This is the good news.

And it was this gospel that Peter neglected; it was this gospel to which Paul anchored his heart. It was living out this gospel that caused Paul to be free from the fear of man and publically confront the leader of the church.

How the Gospel help us: Promise not Performance

Alright, now that we know what the gospel is, how does it help us with the fear of man? How is the gospel connected to the solution of our battle with the fear of man?

1. It humbles me

It is not possible to be made righteous by the works of the law. Meaning, there is nothing that I can do on my own to be right with God. I'm helpless and hopeless on my own. I cannot do it. My hope is not in me because everything that I do is tainted by my sinfulness. Our only hope is to place our hope in someone else who did everything for us, namely Christ.

So when something comes that humbles you or gives people a picture of who you really are – embrace it! Your worth does not come from what people think of you, but from what God has declared over you, placed in you, and in what He is changing you into.

Freedom from the fear of man is found by embracing the fact that you don't have to be perfect; you just have to know and love a Savior who is. Not everyone is going to like you. In fact you don't deserve that level of affection.

2. It makes me pleasing to God

The Bible calls what happens to us justification – a legal declaration over you through the work of Christ.

Justification involves two key parts: 1) the total forgiveness of your sins through Christ's atonement, and 2) that God has taken the perfect obedience of Christ and given it to you. The result of this (according to Romans 3:27) is the obliteration of all boasting. You are a sinner saved by grace. You are imperfect. You make mistakes. You are sinful. But by God's grace you have the life of Christ.

Therefore, being crucified with Christ is a permanent position. Christ now lives in you. You are His! You need to hear these verses in light of your struggle with the fear of man:

"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31).

"For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Rom 8:37-39)

"Whenever I am afraid, I will trust in You. In God (I will praise His word), In God I have put my trust; I will not fear. What can flesh do to me?" (Ps 56:3-4)

"I called on the LORD in distress; The LORD answered me and set me in a broad place. The LORD is on my side; I will not fear. What can man do to me?" (Ps 118:5-6)

The beauty of being forgiven means that you are fully approved by God. And to win the battle with the fear of man we have to treasure what God thinks and says about us over and against what others think and say. The fear of man thrives on a performance mentality. Conquering an approval addiction means learning to put aside performance and living on **promise**.

3. It gives me promises to trust

Coming to faith in Christ means that you put your faith in Christ. You trusted in God's promise to forgive you of your sins by granting you the righteousness of Christ. Being a follower of Jesus means that you have trusted the promises of the Word of God for the condition of your heart.

The problem for many Christians is that they fail to live **continually and daily** on the promise of God. The battle with the approval is a battle for which promise we will believe. The fear of man offers us promises – "I'll feel better if they like me", "I won't be lonely if I have friends", "I be really happy if they would just treat me better", etc.

This is an age-old strategy of the Devil. Even in the garden he offered a promise to Eve – “You will be like God!” (Gen 3:4).

So let me give you a few examples of how I fight promise with promise:

- When I begin to think too much about what others think of me, I fight by faith with the promise, “What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31).
- When I begin to crave the affirmation or approval of others, I fight by faith with the promise, “Therefore we make it our aim...to be pleasing to Him” (2 Cor. 5:9).
- When I’m tempted to think that God has forgotten me and I start to place my hope in man, I fight by faith with the promise, “Cursed is the man who trusts in man and makes flesh his strength. Whose heart departs from the Lord....Blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose hope the Lord is” (Jer. 17:5,7).
- When I begin to worry about what will happen to me if I do what fearing God requires, I fight by faith with the promise, “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).
- When I fear that people will cause crushing circumstances in my life, I fight by faith with the promise, “God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work” (2 Cor. 9:8).
- When I’d rather be quiet than be misquoted, misrepresented, or mocked behind my back, I fight by faith with the promise, “I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Cor. 12:10).
- When I feel like a failure or when I have disappointed someone despite my best efforts, I fight by faith with the promise, “I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind, Even to give every man according to his ways, According to the fruit of his doings” (Jer. 17:10).
- When the fear of man has gotten the best of me and I want to strike back in sinful anger, I fight by faith with the promise, “for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God” (James 1:20).
- When I feel like the approval of others is more valuable than God’s, I fight by faith with the promise, “...esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt...for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (Heb. 11:26-27)

Do you see it? Behind the snare and the idol of approval addiction is a promise – something that the enemy offers to you. And you fight promise with promise! This is what Peter missed, and it happens every time that you give into the fear of man. You end up living by the wrong promise.

Followers of Jesus live their lives in light of the promise of the gospel – “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal 2:20).

The gospel humbles me, reminding me that I cannot self-atone. The gospel makes me pleasing to God, declaring over me that my life is based upon promise not performance. The gospel gives me promises to trust in, empowering me to live a life that is free from being addicted to approval. And as we'll see next week – free to love other people.

When the engineers who built the Golden Gate Bridge considered how they would build the famous and large bridge, they wanted to see the risk to human life lowered. Historically working on a bridge was called the “Dance of Danger.” Working on top of swaying catwalks and high towers, sometimes hundreds of feet in the air, blown by ill winds, this dance had even yielded a calculated fatality rate: For each one million dollars spent, one life would be lost. That was what one could expect.

But the Golden Gate Bridge was destined to be different. When construction began in 1932, numerous safety measures were put into place and strictly enforced: mandatory use of hard hats, prescription filtered eye glasses, no show-boating, tie off lines and an on-site hospital helped greatly reduce the casualty rate. After four years of construction and \$20 million spent, only one worker had died.

However, the most effective safety device, without question, was as new to bridge building as it was old to the circus: the use of a trapeze net. Costing \$130,000 this large net draped sixty feet below the roadbed under construction extending ten feet to either side.

The safety net was so effective that the newspapers began running box scores: ‘Score on the Gate Bridge Safety net to Date: 8 Lives Saved!’ Beyond that, the net had another significant benefit: it freed many of the workers from an often-paralyzing sense of fear. And that, many said, helped them work more productively.”¹ A simple net underneath the roadbed freed them from paralyzing fear.

In the same way, justification is meant to free you from living by performance. Followers of Jesus live their lives by trusting in the promises of God.

You conquer the fear of man by daily embracing this statement: “I am crucified with Christ!” The promise of the gospel triumphs over the approval of man.

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¹ Lewis, Robert. The Church of Irresistible Influence. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishers, 2001. p. 140-141.