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GALATIANS 2:6-21

Galatians Series

[Abrupt start to audio]

[PRAYER] Come into your presence and talk to you as a personal Father. It is a privilege that we can come in and enjoy who you are to ask requests of you, to ask you to lead us and guide us, and then you speak to us, you reveal things to us. Lord, that is just a privilege. I pray for those here today who may not know you yet personally. I pray that you would use this service and this teaching and this worship and this fellowship to be a place where they might experience that a little bit more and hunger for that. Lord, we do thank you for Jesus who died on the cross for us to be our Savior. He really introduced us to you as Father so that we could get to know you in that personal way. So Father, teach us how to pray. Lead us and guide us continually we ask as we grow in our faith and try to understand more about what it means to rely on you and trust you every day of our lives. And so we pray: *Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and power and the glory forever and ever, amen. Amen.*

Open your Bibles with me to the book of Galatians in the New Testament, Galatians 2:6-21. As we're going verse by verse through the book of Galatians, this is the passage where we happen to be today.

I want to recognize the fact that we're jumping into the middle of a passage here. So I want to pull back for a moment and I want to bring you up to speed as to where we are so that we understand where we are in this particular passage.

Last week we looked at six principles that talk about our freedom that we have in Christ, that we need to look at all at the same time. We looked at Galatians 2 and chapter 5, 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, and Romans 14 because we stepped out of Galatians for a moment to just talk about freedom and what that looks like. What does Christian freedom look like and when is it limited? What does that look like in practical ways?

This week we're going to go back in Galatians 2 and I want to explain to you what's happening in the first five verses to bring you up to speed.

You see, Paul had visited Jerusalem and when he visited Jerusalem he went to the leaders to talk to them. He chose to not circumcise Titus. Circumcision was a big issue in the early church because the Jews were circumcised. But Paul chose not to circumcise Titus to make a point. He

wasn't afraid of what was going on in the dialogue because some of the Jewish believers believed that you had to be circumcised in order to be saved. Paul was not going to submit to that teaching because Paul knew that he was saved by grace and not by any works of the law, that his salvation came because of the grace that God had given him in his own personal life.

We pick up the story in verse 6 as he's in Jerusalem. It says this: *As for those who were held in high esteem* (those are like the church leaders he's talking about when he came to them)—*whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism—they added nothing to my message.*

So what he's saying is I went before the church leaders and I wasn't concerned that they weren't like church leaders because I recognize the church of God's grace and how powerful that is. I wasn't going to change my message because I was in the midst of great people.

One of the beautiful things that we recognize in the church is that when we come to the cross it is level. There are no people that stand above other people. We're all equals when it comes before the cross of Christ. Paul realized that as he was going through, so he didn't sacrifice the message at all. Instead he says basically, "I don't care what position they have. I came in and I didn't want to change my position based on the influence that might exist there."

Verse 7: *On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised.* I find this very interesting about how the church is working and how the church functions in this particular scenario.

For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. Essentially what Paul is saying is that they recognized that he was a missionary to the uncircumcised. They saw his gifts and they acknowledged that. They recognized that Peter was a missionary to the circumcised, to the Jewish people. They recognized that and that was okay.

People come to church with gifts. When you accept Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, one of the things that you get is a spiritual gift. That means you have some way to bless other people. Sometimes that blessing is used within the church and sometimes it's used outside of the church.

But the point is if you're here today and you've accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior and God has brought you to this church, He's brought us something special in you. Just like those leaders saw Paul and said, "This guy has something special. He's a missionary to the uncircumcised. We're going to acknowledge that. We want to be in that kind of a position at our church."

I really like the way that church is functioning here and what it's doing in this particular situation, recognizing that people have gifts and they use those gifts in their vision.

So here's what happens. You come into a church like this and you look around and you see something that you might not feel comfortable with. There's something that needs to change.

Now some people could become critical about that, but maybe God has gifted you in a way that says I see that problem there because that's my gift. So there's a hole in this church until you came. God brought you for a specific reason at a specific time to be here and be a part of what He wants to do in this church. You take a need that you see and you move with it.

That model of church leadership is the kind of leadership model we embrace here at Calvary Chapel. There are some churches that establish a hierarchy that has a bunch of committees they establish. Those committees' jobs are to find those needs and find people to find those needs. That can work in some places. But I like this model and I like the model we use which basically says if God has brought you here, He's brought you here for a reason. What is your vision? What kind of gifts do you have? What does God want to do in the midst of this? Needs are still met because you look around and see needs and you say, "Wow, God has gifted me in a particular area. I'm going to work to meet that need." And then we all work together as a body. The church is described as a body functioning together in order to serve the Lord. I think it's a beautiful picture.

And then there are some jobs we do that we might not have a vision for. Just service tasks that we do just because we're together and we serve each other. We haul our stuff out of here and haul it in here every week. We don't have to have a spiritual gift for that; you just do it. Or you might work in the nursery because there's a need there and you do it because that's service. But predominantly the way we function is that we're looking for the vision that God has brought to a person.

So here Paul comes in. He talks to the church leaders and they go, "Yes! God is working here. Let's be blessed. Let's go forward."

I really like these next words in verse 9. *James, Cephas (Cephas is Peter – that's his other name) and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.*

I just love that. The *right hand of fellowship* is this extent that we're welcoming you in in this area of fellowship so that we can take advantage of the grace God has given you. So we all come to this room today with God's grace inside of us, eager to share that with other people.

The church is not just a place where you come and receive. The church is a place where you fit into the body in a puzzle where you're contributing to what's going on. It's a beautiful place that we are in the church and that's what's happening here. I really liked this.

It continues on in verse 9. *They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.*

In other words there was some guidance here. They didn't say, "Everybody just do what you want to do in the church." No, there was some guidance. In this case they said be sure just to care for the poor because that's the kind of church we are. We're a church that cares for the poor. Paul says, "Well I'm doing that anyway, so I fit in really well here."

There are some times when people come to Calvary Chapel and they might have some unusual idea that may not fit into the vision. So our job is to kind of guide that vision and to help people fit that vision into what God is doing here at Calvary Chapel.

Church leadership. I just think it's an amazing thing that happens here. It's not so structured. It's more Spirit-led, guided, and I appreciate that.

I'm going to go on now. This is what happened in Jerusalem. The next verses are fascinating as we go up to Antioch up north and we're still going to deal with the same characters, Peter and Paul.

Notice what happens in verse 11 because now we have a confrontation that takes place up there. So here the church is functioning really well in Jerusalem. Now it's going to go up and we're going to get a glimpse of what is happening in Antioch and we're going to see a confrontation take place there. I think that's the church functioning as well.

Notice in verse 11 – *When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.* So he used to eat with the Gentiles. Now he's withdrawing, he's pulling back from that. And why is he doing that? Because he's afraid of a group of people. Whoa. Interesting.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray, who was Paul's traveling companion.

Cephas was in Jerusalem, now he's in Antioch. Peter originally was very cordial and very accepting toward the Gentiles. He spent time with them, he encouraged them, he fellowshiped with them. Then came a problem. I think it's a problem we sometimes face in our own lives. I just want to talk about it because this could happen to us.

This is a guy who was a pillar of the church, as described here. This is a guy who's a leader who walked with Christ, yet he fell into a problem in his life, and that can happen in each one of our lives. Watch what happens here and learn from it.

If there was a rather powerful group among the church, this was the group that said, "Now if you're going to worship, you have to worship this way. And if you don't worship this way then you're not as spiritual as the other people who worship over here." They were saying that circumcision is that key. So if you're circumcised then you are more Jewish. God's people are the Jewish people, so you want to be circumcised.

I can identify with what they're saying, but they're wrong because when Christ came He broke that down to allow us the freedom to come to Him based on grace, and circumcision was not required. Maybe it had been okay for them to say, "I believe that God wants me to be circumcised." The problem is they were pulling people across the line and saying, "In order for

you to be saved, you need to be circumcised,” and that’s where they got into trouble. They become a rather powerful group here apparently having significant emphasis and power in a way that was inappropriate.

I think we need to be responsive, not just as leaders, just as people responsive to what other people think. We need to listen because sometimes when we listen to other people and what they think, we learn something. We go, “Oh yeah. I’m starting to get off track.” But there are other times when we need to take a stand because what other people are thinking is not what we need to be thinking. We need to take a stand and say, “I’m not going to go that direction.” It takes wisdom and grace to know which you’re going to do. Listen? Or are you going to take a stand? It takes truth, it takes love to be able to do that.

Now Peter became overly concerned about what this group thought. That’s what it says there. It’s for fear. He was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. So that was his problem. I want you to see here why it’s a problem. This isn’t like an accident for people. Peter knew that this was the wrong thing.

I want to take you back in a little bit of history of Peter so you can understand this. When Peter’s walking with Christ there was a time when the people challenged him and the others and said to Jesus, “Why don’t your disciples wash their hands like everybody else?” Ceremonial washing of hands is what they’re talking about.

Jesus made a statement to Peter and to the others that were there in this story. He says it’s not the things that come into the mouth that make a person unclean. It’s the things that come out of the mouth – the greed, the hatred, the murder and so on. They’re inside the heart. So he’s making a point about the heart and how important the heart is. We don’t look at the outside. “So what do we do then?” they ask.

What was said about the Pharisees is this: The Pharisees are *like blind guides leading the blind*. They don’t realize what they’re doing and they’re leading other people who don’t realize what they’re doing along this path of blindness. Peter was told there what is most important in that walk with Christ.

Now later on after the resurrection, Christ is gone, Pentecost takes place, and revival is taking place around the world in various places. Jerusalem is where the church started, but then the Jews are hearing about something that’s happening down by the Gentiles in Samaria. Samaria’s the place where the Samaritans and the Jews didn’t get along very well, so there was an ethnic diversity there. But something was happening and Philip was down there. Philip was an evangelist.

People apparently are getting saved down there and the Holy Spirit’s coming down on them, so they sent two people down there to check it out, Peter and John. These guys go down to check out what’s going on down there. They go down there and they realize, “Wow. God is at work here among the Gentiles. Wow. God is doing something amazing.” The Bible says that they not only affirmed what was going on, but on the way back they stopped at other Samaritan villages

and told them about Christ. There's a big revival in the Samaria area. Peter knew what God was doing among the Gentiles.

In Acts 10 there was a very personal experience that Peter had in regards to this. The Bible says this was about noon and Peter was on the roof (they had flat roofs), and he was probably maybe sunning himself up on the roof just resting until lunch was made. He was hungry the Bible says and *he got into a trance*. You know how it is when you're hungry; you get into a trance.

The sheet comes down and there are unclean animals in it. A voice says, "Go ahead and eat these unclean animals in a kosher way." Peter being a strong Jew says, "No way. I'm not eating those things." It happened three times and the voice said (obviously God saying), "*What I have made clean, do not make unclean.*"

Just then there was a knock on the door. The story steps back and tells us about a man named Cornelius who had heard from the Lord. God was doing a work in his life way up in Caesarea. Now there's a knock on the door because Cornelius' men show up right at that time. God is doing a work in Peter's life and saying, "Peter, *don't call unclean what I've called clean.*" There's a knock on the door because Gentiles want to know more about the Lord. So Peter says, "Come on in, guys. Let's have lunch first, then we're going." They head off and Peter goes up into Caesarea where Cornelius knew he was coming and was waiting for him. God did an amazing thing in another Gentile's life.

Here we have God demonstrating to Peter again that He's doing something among the Gentiles. Peter does not have an excuse for what he's doing now in Antioch. He had experienced God among the Gentiles several times and God doing a revival in the midst of all of those things. Now he comes to Antioch later on. He comes from Jerusalem and I'm sure he must have been like a rock star.

Here he is. He's one of those guys that was with Jesus and I'm sure they had questions about what was it like to walk on the water. Tell us about Lazarus raised from the dead, all of his famous stories that he told. I'm sure the tweets were going out, parking was bad, all kinds of things happening that made it pretty prestigious, I think, for Peter to have this role in Antioch.

Some of the folks coming up from the Jerusalem church were influencing the situation and putting some pressure on it, it appears, and so it says there that he gently pulled back. That's the idea here. He just stopped receiving the invitations to go to houses and eat. Because that's commonly what they did. He'd go from house to house and eat food.

You can imagine the wives saying, "Oh I don't know. What should I cook for this guy? Should I make kosher or not kosher?" That's the debate of the day. What should I cook? And the husband says, "Just feed him wings. We're going to watch the Eagles anyway or something." It's not about food.

So here comes Peter in this situation and he becomes somehow persuaded to pull out, to withdraw, gently refuses the invitation.

Proverbs 29:25 says, *Fear of man will prove to be a snare.* That seems to be what's taking place here. He's making a significant issue in the church.

Now I want to step back. There's one more thing I want to show you before we see what happens because I think this is a weakness in Peter's life that Peter, if we look at his history, has a weakness in this area.

He's the guy who has confidence to say he has great faith but not a lot of courage, it seems to me. His faith would say, "Lord, have me come out on the water and I'll walk on the water." But he doesn't have the courage to back it up, to walk on the water, and to hang in there. It was just a maid, a girl, not probably someone of very much significance who said, "Aren't you with Jesus?" Because of fear he lied. Three times he said, "I don't know the man." This is at the trial of Jesus.

Here's a guy who had a lot of faith but not a lot of courage. He had a weakness in his life that hindered from being able to move forward without the fear of man. That's challenging. So his behavior is not consistent with what he's saying. His walk isn't consistent with his talk. He can talk pretty well, but his walk isn't there.

Frankly, this should be of great hope to you and me, I think. Because when we start looking at something like this, we say, "Wow. There's hope for me." If Peter's a guy who could have a problem in this area, God could do some great things in my life as well. I can imagine people saying, "Where is Peter? He's been a little distant lately. Haven't seen him around." But when Barnabas started getting influenced by this, even Barnabas is led astray to pull back from the Gentiles. That's when Paul says, "I've got to do something about this. I've got to make a stand here." So it says he confronted Peter.

Notice in Galatians 2:14 – *When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"*

As we go through the next verses, we're going to see the summary of his argument, but he's calling them into account.

I remember the story in the Old Testament about Elijah who goes as God's representative onto Mount Carmel. You have all the Baal prophets and you have Elijah. All the people are watching and Elijah calls out to all the people and says to them, "How long are we going to waver between two opinions? It's time to make a choice. It's time to choose what you're going to do. It's time to do the right thing." That's the call that I think is going out to Peter. That's the call that goes out in our lives as well.

Sometimes leaders find themselves in challenging places. Here's Peter as a leader. He finds himself moving away from the center of what God wants. He needs to be able to be willing to listen to confrontation or listen to a correction in his life. Let's just look at Paul's argument and then we'll try to see what his response is because we don't see the response here. We have to kind of surmise what his response is from another passage.

Let's see what Paul's argument is starting in verse 15. *"We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."*

So if you're here today and you don't know anything about salvation, this is the explanation of it for us so that we understand what it's saying. What it's saying there is that we're not saved by works. You don't earn yourself into heaven.

Sometimes when I talk to people about whether they want to accept the Lord into their life or not, they'll say something like, "Well I feel like God's going to accept me. I've done more good than bad." It's very clear in the Bible that that's not an appropriate answer when evaluating one's salvation. It says it's by faith in Jesus Christ.

So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

You can't get saved by good works. I'm sorry. If that's how you think you're going to earn your way into heaven, you're making a significant mistake. The passage is laying it out for us here so that we know that salvation comes by faith in Jesus Christ, that personal relationship.

Verse 17: *"But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God."*

So what he's saying is it's not about rules. It's about relationship. When you start thinking about faith and church, you don't want to start thinking about in terms of organized religion. It's not about organized religion. It's about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ.

If you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ then you're not there. You can have that when you come before Him and you ask Him to come into your life, to run your life, to control you. It's by faith in Jesus Christ. It's not about religion. It's about Jesus.

That's a pretty clear statement that Paul's making there, and we don't get to see Peter's response. I wish Paul would have included that here, but that doesn't include Peter's response here, so we have to surmise how Peter responded. In order to do that, I want to take you to Peter's writing because in 2 Peter 3 we have Peter writing referring back to Paul. I want you to see the attitude Peter has toward Paul. It gives me the impression that Peter responded well to correction in his life.

I want to respond well to correction. I can be like Peter. If I'm getting off track somewhere, I hope someone comes and corrects me and challenges me so I can move in the right direction and follow the Lord. I just think we all want to have that kind of position.

Let's look at what Peter writes at the end of his letter. In 2 Peter 3:15-16 he says this: *Bear in mind that our Lord's patience means salvation, just as our dear brother Paul* (so he refers to him

as dear brother Paul) also wrote you with the wisdom that God gave him. He writes the same way in all his letters, speaking in them of these matters. His letters contain some things that are hard to understand (I'm glad Peter felt like Paul's words were hard to understand. I find them hard to understand too. So if Peter did, that's a little encouraging for me), *which ignorant and unstable people distort, as they do the other Scriptures, to their own destruction.*

Do you see that word *other*? The *other Scriptures*? Peter is here commending Paul's writings to be the same as the other scriptures. That this is the word of God when Paul wrote. Fascinating.

It's just an encouragement to me to see that when we make mistakes that doesn't mean that we have to go at odds with someone. We can respond well to the correction that comes out. It seems that Peter did respond well in this situation and I really appreciate that response. I want to have that kind of response in my own heart when correction comes my way, that I'm willing to adjust course and see God at work. In fact I regularly say, "God, just whisper to me. I don't want to have a hammer that has to hit me on the head. Just whisper to me. I want to listen to your whispers and those whispers come through all kinds of sources, through His word, through other folks.

Let's finish off Galatians 2 with the last two verses. First of all, before I read it I want you to see there's eight personal pronouns here – *I* and *me* mentioned eight times. It's personal. You've got to understand. This is personal. That's what he's saying. It's a great way for us to conclude in the application here in verse 20 and 21.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. He could say that because he'd accepted Christ.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross it was a sacrifice that He made for our sins so that we could have a personal relationship with Him. What you want to know is that when Christ died it's as if you were crucified with Him when you accept Him in your life so you don't have to experience that crucifixion. He's alive in you. He's working in you. He comes to live inside of you.

Notice verse 20 – *but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.*

We're talking about a very personal gospel here. This isn't about following a bunch of rules or attending a particular church. This is about knowing Jesus Christ personally, accepting in your own life the sacrifice that He made for your sins so that you could have that relationship, and then He's living in you. You're living out your life in Him.

Verse 21: "*I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!*" There's no way that you're going to obtain righteousness in your life or acceptable presence before God because of something you do. It only comes through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. That's what Paul is saying in this book of Galatians.

The Bible is a beautiful book because it's the word of God. It's God's vehicle for communicating to us who He is, who we are, and what His plan is. That plan that He has involves us in a personal way.

I want to encourage you if you've never accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior you do it. You do what the Bible is saying right there. You accept Him. I've been crucified with Christ. He lives in me. That's the statement that Paul made. It's the statement that we can make in our own lives as well. It means that everything we do then is about God. Our weaknesses are recognized as something that God can bring strength into.

I can bring Christ to people and I like to do that. I like to share Christ with people. But I can't bring people to Christ. God is the one who does that.

God may be doing that in your life today. He may be bringing you to a place in your heart where you say, "Yes, I know I need Jesus Christ. I want Him to reign in my life. I want Him to control me." If He's brought you to that place, you want to respond. Talk to Him. Pray. That's what prayer is. You can come to Him and pray and say, "God, I want you to run my life. I want you to be everything for me. I want you to be my all. Everything that fits into that all, I want you to be in my life. I want you to control me." It's personal. It's not about rules; it's about relationship.

We're going to sing a worship song and as we do if the Lord is speaking to your heart and you'd like to accept Jesus Christ into your life today, then I want to invite you to speak to one of the prayer counselors on the side that will be there. Just go up to them and tell them what you want. Or maybe you want prayer for a particular area of your life. We believe in prayer. We know that prayer works and God works in people's lives when we pray. So if you'd like prayer for an area of your life, go to one of the prayers counselors and they'll pray for you.

This is a time for you to respond to the worship and the fellowship and the teaching today. As we worship the Lord we're going to focus on who He is, who He wants to be in our lives, how He wants to work through our weaknesses to bring strength in our lives. That's what God wants to do. So as we worship in this next song, allow the Lord to speak to your heart and bring you to a special place in that relationship that He wants to have. It's personal.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, we do thank you for what you're doing in each one of our hearts, for bringing us here today, for this message that's in Galatians 2. We thank you for dying on the cross for us, for salvation, and for the way that it energizes us, changes us, and empowers us. So Lord, right now I pray for each one of us here. You know our weaknesses, our challenges. Speak to us now as we worship you. In Jesus' name, amen.