



## Free to Unite

### RECAP

#### **This week's focus: In Christ, you are free to live by faith.**

A man named Saul set out to destroy the church and began putting Christians in prison. He was on a mission to eliminate anyone associated with the followers of "the way". God, however, had other plans for Saul. In a dramatic turn of events, Saul was blinded on the road to Damascus where he had a personal encounter with Jesus. His name would be changed from Saul to Paul and God would use him as His instrument to reach the Gentiles.

The Gospel was now made available to everyone. Whether Jew or Gentile, slave or free, the Good News is that Jesus died to save you. This is a gift made available to anyone who would, by an act of faith, receive it.

Yet, there were those in the religious community who wanted to add Jewish conditions and traditions to the gift of salvation. God had convinced Peter, a Jew, that the Gospel was also for the Gentiles (Acts 10). However, as he began associating with the Gentiles, his Jewish brothers began to criticize him and encouraged him to return to his Jewish ways. Peter and a certain part of the early church began to demand that Gentile Christians become more Jewish by adopting Jewish customs and traditions. This caused division in the church.

The cancer of legalism was a direct threat to the unity of the early church. Peter had fallen into the trap of people pleasing. To justify himself and seek the approval of men, Peter fell into the approval trap. He was now adding to the Gospel of Jesus a salvation dependent on human works. Adding anything to the Gospel would cancel out everything Jesus had done on the cross to save mankind.

Paul immediately confronted Peter face to face calling him out on this serious error that could destroy the work of God and His church. He pointed out that adding anything (even the law) to the Gospel is "no Gospel at all".

The same cancer of division exists in the church today. Like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, we look for ways to justify ourselves. We begin adding things to the Gospel through rules or denying it all together through rebellion. Both legalism and liberalism threaten the unity of God's church.

The Gospel is not a system of rules and regulations, nor it is a license to do whatever we please. The Old Testament law had its purpose; to guide and educate. Jesus was the fulfillment of the law, and it is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone that we are forgiven, given a new identity, and set free.

Our identity in Christ redefines who we are and how we approach life. Paul said that "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me." This new identity in Christ is the cornerstone of the Christian life. In Christ we are free to be united regardless of social status, political party, race, and economic differences. In Christ we are free from the fear of man and that means we can be lovingly confront those who are promoting a different Gospel. Most importantly, in Christ we are free from our own self-doubt and insecurity that drives our need to justify ourselves. Remember you are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, and in Christ alone!



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### SHARE (5-10 min)

Icebreaker Question: When you think about any accomplishments in your life (running a business, keeping a garden, raising perfect kids, employee of the month, etc.), what reasons do you give for them? Why?

### STUDY (about 30 min) Read Galatians 2:11-21

1. What about the reading or message on Sunday that stood out to you? Is there anything that was unclear, or you have questions about?
2. In what areas of life are we sometimes asked to justify ourselves to others? Why is the impulse to earn favor, or prove ourselves (to others and to God), so deeply ingrained in our hearts?
3. According to this passage, what was Peter's hypocrisy? What was he afraid of? Read Acts 10. Why do you think he was so quick to change?
4. Peter's addition to the Gospel brought division in the church. Why is unity so important? How is unity different from uniformity?
5. What kind of things do you see at GateWay that threaten the Gospel and the unity of the church? How can we protect and promote unity?
6. Justification is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ Jesus alone. What does that mean when it comes to doing whatever you want? Describe how your desires/affections/passions have changed by having been justified by faith.
7. Justification can be understood as "Just if I had never sinned". Read Ephesians 1:3-14. What are the riches and blessings promised to those who have been justified?
8. Read Galatians 2:20. Paul explains we have died with Christ and now Christ lives both in us and through us giving us a new identity (Gal 2:20). How has this new identity set you free? Where are you still struggling to let Christ live in you?

### SUPPORT (15 min)

**Pray:** Take time to pray for the needs of one another and the unity of the church in Santa Cruz County.

\*Invite your life group to attend the Pregnancy Resource Center Banquet on Thursday, May 4<sup>th</sup>. This is a free event at the Coconut Grove.

**Memory verse:** "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, 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." Galatians 2:20