

A Seat at the Table (Part 2)

Text: Galatians 2:15-21

Summary

In this sermon, we examined the exhausting habit of moral scorekeeping and the relief found in the true gospel of Jesus Christ. We often live as moral accountants, keeping a ledger of our good and bad deeds to determine our standing before God. Paul's confrontation with Peter in Galatians 2:15-21 reveals the theological heartbeat of the gospel that we all need to hear as moral scorekeepers: we are justified by faith in Jesus Christ alone. The call for us is to abandon our self-righteous scorecards, recognize that Christ took our curses, and live by faith in the Son of God who loved us and gave Himself for us.

Sermon Outline

The Exhaustion of Moral Scorekeeping

We functionally live as moral scorekeepers who maintain a running ledger of our good and bad deeds. This internal accounting makes us believe our actions either commend us or condemn us before God. We compare our personal scorecards with the scorecards of others, resulting in pride when we feel superior and condemnation when we fail. Relying on moral scorekeeping for a seat at God's table is an exhausting and defeating way to live. There's got to be a better way.

Catch-Up: The Truth of the Gospel

Paul is deeply concerned about a false gospel infiltrating the Galatian churches. As he continues his confrontation with Peter, he introduces the theological heartbeat of the true gospel that brings relief to our weary souls.

Moral Scorekeeping Cannot Save You (v15-16)

A person (Jew or Gentile) is justified entirely by faith in Jesus Christ, apart from works of the law. "Justified" means to be declared in the right or righteous before God. A judge declares a person innocent or guilty according to a righteous standard (Deuteronomy 25:1; Job 25:4). "The Law" is the Old/Mosaic Covenant given to Israel and ratified at Mt. Sinai. The law is a complete unit, requiring obedience to any part obligates a person to keep the whole law (Galatians 5:3-4; Deuteronomy 22:8; Galatians 3:10). "Works of the law" are simply the deeds or actions demanded by the Law. The Old Covenant guided Israel and exposed their sin so they would bank on God's abundant mercy (Psalm 51:1-3). However many had turned this into a legalistic system. Legalism occurs when people trust in themselves to be righteous. The Pharisee in Luke 18 proudly trusted his Law-keeping, his scorecard, to be righteous. But the tax collector humbly pleaded for God's mercy. Jesus says that the humble tax collector went home justified. Right standing before God comes entirely by faith in Jesus Christ. God made Jesus to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God (2 Corinthians 5:21).

V. Moral Scorekeeping Cannot Sustain You

The Old Covenant served its purpose and now is abolished. Christ broke down “the dividing wall of hostility by abolishing the law of commandments expressed in ordinances” (Ephesians 2:14-15). Therefore, Paul says, to try to rebuild it would be sin. He has died to the Law, moving on to find life in God (Galatians 2:19). Now true life is found in being united to Jesus in His death and resurrection. Rather than living a life of sin because we are no longer under the Law, we live by faith in the Son of God, resting in the truth that He loved us and gave Himself for us (Galatians 2:20). This produces in us that which is pleasing to God.

When we rest in the truth that we are completely loved, accepted, and approved by the God of the universe, it removes the fear of rejection that leads to people-pleasing. When we find our identity in Jesus, it allows us to put down our masks and be honest about our sin because He loved us at our worst. When we make faith in Christ as the sole marker of His people, it breaks down the wall-building of personal preference.

VI. Moral Scorekeeping or Grace

If we could be righteous on our own, then Jesus didn't need to come and die. Adding anything to the finished work of Christ nullifies the grace of God and implies Christ died for no purpose (Galatians 2:21). God canceled the record of debt that stood against us, nailing it to the cross (Colossians 2:13-15). We must abandon moral scorekeeping and bank our hope entirely on Jesus, whose perfect scorecard becomes ours by faith.