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Paul's Confidence in Christ

Selected Scriptures

Prayer: *Father God, we do again thank you and praise you for who you are and for what you have done. We do bless your name indeed, Father. We thank you for the gift of your Son, we thank you for the gift of your word, and we pray this morning as we open up your word, we would have the gift of your Holy Spirit. Lord, give us your Spirit, accompany us as we open up your book, give us the ability to take in this material and make it of permanent value, we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.*

Well, we're in the book of Galatians and we're at the second chapter, the very start of the second chapter. This is Paul's opening statement. He says: *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. Paul was about to begin a journey and he'd had a revelation and he went in response to it to the church leaders in Jerusalem about a problem-filled church in Galatia that had been infiltrated with false teachers. He didn't realize that he was about to step into an extraordinarily difficult set of circumstances that would test*

his identity in Christ from his past, through his present and into his future. Paul's horrendous treatment of Christians should have haunted his past and it should have crippled his present and made him fearful about his future, but we know that Paul was an extraordinarily confident leader. We also know that his confidence didn't come from Paul, it came from Christ. There is a psychological technique known as visualization. It's something that people, particularly athletes often use when they're approaching some kind of difficult maneuver. If you ever watched the Olympics, oftentimes you see divers or gymnasts visualizing what they are going to do before they actually undertake it. Well, Paul engaged in a form of visualization but it was not centered on Paul. Instead it was centered on Christ bearing all of Paul's sins, taking them to the cross, crucifying them with himself. See, through all of his trials, Paul kept his focus and his sanity by appropriating the words he expresses at the end of chapter 2. This is *Galatians 2:20*. He says: *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.*

Paul learned and so can we that an identity with Christ and him crucified can be the solution to anything the enemy throws at us whether it be from our past, our present or our future. And so

first we take a quick glimpse at Paul's past. Chapter two of the book of Galatians opens with Paul still working to establish his bona fides with the church leaders at Jerusalem. As we said the last time, Paul labored his entire life trying to work out from under his reputation as a persecutor of the church. And now we see Paul having been established for almost two decades, he's still dealing with his past. Paul, Barnabas and Titus go up to Jerusalem because Paul has received a revelation and God is clearly revealing that there's this great threat to this newly established church that needed to be addressed. And in order to address it, Paul first has to address his past reputation not only as a persecutor of the church but also as someone whose authority tends to be questioned. Someone whose authority is questioned because he's not had the same contact with the living Christ that the other apostles had. So Paul says in verse 2 of Galatians, *Galatians 2*, he says: *I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.* Paul speaks about privately meeting with those who seemed influential. Now he's not talking about being in with the in crowd so much as he's wanting to address those who have infiltrated the church and spread the word that Paul is this second class apostle devoid of authority, incapable of discerning truth from error. There were wolves moving in on the

flock and they were focused on Paul and they had to be identified and dealt with. And to do that effectively, he first had to meet with those who had authority over this local body. So three different times in *Galatians 2* Paul refers to people of influence in the churches. In verse 2 he says: *I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim.* And in verse 6 he says: *And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.* And then in verse 9 he says: *When James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me.*

I remember years ago when I was first introduced to the writings of Paul thinking that he seemed awfully arrogant. I mean just reading Paul, it seemed to me he had very little filter surrounding his thoughts. And what Paul really had was not arrogance, it wasn't a lack of filters, what it was instead was confidence in Christ. You know, the other day I came across an article that my browser suggested I read. It was entitled "*Nine Ways to Get People to Like You.*" Who doesn't want people to like you? So I clicked on the article and sure enough, there's nine things that I can do that would instantly make people like me. I can sum up the article in

four words: Be like Christ was. I mean even though the article wasn't Christian, it pointed to behavior traits like patience and gentleness and self-control that were exactly how Christ lived his life. Understand something about Christ. Christ was by definition the best any human being could ever be, and that included all of those things that make us attractive. You know, we've spoken in the past about the fruits of the Spirit and they actually do come from the book of Galatians, the fifth chapter. *Galatians 5:22* says: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.* And we've spoken of how those nine qualities represent the loveliness of Christ and the one thing we said over and over again is that you don't gain those qualities by pursuing them in and of themselves, that is you don't become patient as a fruit of the Spirit by pursuing patience. You don't become joyful or peaceful by pursuing joy and peace. You gain all of the fruits of the Spirit not by seeking the fruit itself but by pursuing the source of that fruit and that is Christ. And that's why Christ says in *John 15:5*: *I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.* Well, nobody understood that better than Paul. And so I now think I understand exactly where Paul was coming from. What I once saw as arrogance I now see as confidence not in Paul but in Christ. And I think we can see it in

Paul's words about influential people. This is what he says in Galatians 1:6. He says: *And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.* You see, Paul genuinely didn't care what others thought of him. I mean not as some sort of defense mechanism but because he knew precisely where his value came from and it was not from other people; it was from Christ alone. I mean our natural inclination, in fact one of our deepest needs is to have people like us. And the problem is we often pursue that need in a way that ensures that we're never going to achieve it. We don't pursue Christ and we don't pursue the fruit of the Spirit, we pursue things and people and situations that make us feel good about ourselves or at least okay with ourselves. You know, the world mistakenly looks at Paul's approach to influential people and they say, oh, right on, Paul, I mean, you really want to accomplish something in Galatia, you're going to have to first cultivate a relationship with the influential people in the church. I mean after all, these are the people that are not only going to make you feel good about yourself but they're also going to open all kinds of doors for you. That's pretty much SOP, standard operating procedure. But that couldn't be further from the truth

when it comes to Paul. Paul was laser focused on what he needed to do. There were people who were nothing more than wolves among the sheep who had established an influence in the church in Galatia. He was determined to root them out to protect that church. And in order to do that he had to deal first with his past and the reputation that followed him everywhere he went. And so he first had to approach the church's leadership. I mean they would be the ones either helping him or standing in his way as he attempted to right the wrongs that had grown up in Galatia. And this church was already under the influence of the Judaizers who were trying to take it in a wrong direction. And so Paul knew if he was ever going to have an audience with this church, he had to first approach those who were trusted with leadership over all of the churches. I mean it was strictly a strategic move that Paul had to make and he makes his reasons for doing it clear in verse 4. He says: *So that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.* And again he also makes it clear how little he cared about his so-called connections. He says: *(What they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.* There's a reason why Paul had no need whatsoever to seek out influential people to make him feel good about himself, and Paul made it clear in verse 20. He said he had been crucified with Christ. It was no longer Paul who was living but Christ who now lived in Paul. And the life that

Paul lived now, here today in the flesh, he now lived by faith in the Son of God who loved him and gave himself for him.

Now Paul genuinely believed that all the sins of his past which were many and were grievous, I mean, he murdered God's own people, he believed that all of those sins were crucified with Christ and were now dead and buried. I mean do you ever struggle with sins in your past? I mean do you ever have a hard time believing that God has actually forgiven them through Christ? Can you do what Paul did? Can you visualize your sins as Paul did? I mean the sins of his past were now buried with Christ in the past. So Paul was no longer haunted by the past nor was he crippled by the present as well. I mean he's addressing a leadership that at this point still consisted of other apostles and those who had firsthand contact with Christ. And Paul's goal is to connect with them, to make certain that all the parties are on the same page and then use their endorsement of his authority to protect the Galatian church and all of the churches from the heresies that they were being attacked with. But to do that, Paul had to make sure that the authorities were in sync with him and that they were in sync with the gospel. And the big issue that Paul was facing was the gospel plus. I mean it's precisely the way the enemy was attacking the church then and it's frequently the way the enemy attacks the church today.

The gospel is what we talked about last week. God is perfect, man is fallen, Christ is God in the flesh who has come to earth to rescue his sheep by living the perfect life and then offering that life up on the cross so that by faith in his sacrifice he can ransom and rescue his sheep. And so we have God, man, Christ and our response. And our response must be faith and repentance. And that's what we call the gospel. What the church at Galatia was suffering from is what churches everywhere often times suffer from as well, it's the false teaching known as the gospel plus. And the "plus" part can be anything from a different history, culture or denomination, anything that might be added to the gospel. And for some it may be baptism, it may be the way you treat alcohol or dancing or diet or politics or social justice or abortion or any of a hundred other plusses we come up with to add to the gospel in order to somehow or other attempt to earn our way into heaven. In the case of the Galatian church it was the gospel plus all of the rights and rituals of Judaism. See, false teachers had infiltrated the Galatian church insisting that the death that Jesus died on the cross was absolutely necessary but it wasn't sufficient. It needed something else, a plus as it were. And that plus consisted of insisting that all of the ancient rights and rituals of Judaism were still in effect, not the least of which was circumcision. You know we just did a hymn, we sing these hymns. One of the great hymns is *Jesus Paid It All*. Well, their version of that hymn would

be Jesus paid it almost all and the rest is up to me.

The second part of Paul's present quest was to make certain that the leaders of the Jerusalem church were in sync with him and with the gospel. Paul needed to know that the church leaders stood with him not just in what they taught, not just in theory but also in what they did in practice. And so he had one simple way of kind of ferreting that out. He brought with them a man named Titus, an uncircumcised Greek who was not a Jew but he was one of Paul's team. And so Paul figured this would very quickly force the church leaders to show their hands if they had not been in full agreement with Paul. And Paul is happy to see that the church leaders like him are fully committed to preserving the real gospel. This is what he said in verse 3. He says: *But even Titus who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in -- who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery -- to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.* You see, Paul knew that this church desperately needed to be purged of its false teachers and now he knew he had the full support of the leadership and that they were all in sync as to what the real gospel was so that now he could seek their endorsement. And he says in verse 9: *And when James*

and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. Again we want to consider Paul's take on this. He gets the endorsement but it's not Paul's cleverness or his power or persuasion that moves the church leaders, rather it is their perception of the grace that Paul has received. Paul, you see, had been crucified with Christ and it was not Paul who they were perceiving, it was Christ. Paul's goal was to take on the Judaizers who had infiltrated the church to set them right at last about what the real gospel was all about. And so the church leader's response shows Paul and it shows us what God holds as a unifying thread for all true churches. You see, one of the marks of the true church is not that they all look exactly alike or that they worship exactly alike. In fact, the pillars of the church in Jerusalem acknowledged that the church would be best served by having Paul and Barnabas go to the Gentiles and have others go to the circumcised, to the Jews. And what united their leadership was understanding that the gospel was for everyone, for Jew and gentile, female and male, slave and free, whomever God had chosen, that there were no barriers, particularly cultural, religious or legal that should be put up to keep any of these from the gospel. And what united them all was the common understanding they were

charged as a church with what? With remembering the poor. Verse 10: *Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.* You see, it's no secret that the Gentile churches were in far better shape than the Jewish churches. I mean, to be a Jewish Christian in that day was really to cut yourself off from your family, from your culture, from your economic ties and from all the things that enabled you to establish yourself in the culture. Gentiles had a far easier time not being viewed as traitors to their own heritage, their own traditions and that meant that among many other things that it was absolutely crucial for Jewish and Gentile churches to work together and for Gentile churches to help Jewish churches survive. They simply could not afford disunity. I mean thinking about the difference between the wealthier Gentile churches and the poor Jewish churches, again it made me realize how blessed we are to have the relationship that we have with the Christian House of Prayer, our sister church in India. And again, I'll never forget the lesson that I learned when I went to visit them, how quickly they schooled me on what humility and joy amongst unbelievable poverty was all about. I would have to say that going to India was one of the most life-changing experiences I've ever had. And I'll never forget thinking that I was going to go there to teach them some things about God. I had it perfectly backwards. They schooled me and not vice versa. And I've mentioned many different times the partnership that we forged.

I mean they had joy and deep and abiding commitment to living out the gospel in their every day life in the midst of deep poverty and the constant threat of disease, and we had piles and piles of money. Lots and lots of it certainly compared to them. I mean I remember worrying that Pastor Papaf was going to at some time come to the United States and find out the extent of my own personal wealth. I worried that he would find out that I owned my own house and that I could afford three meals a day every single day, that my family owned not one, not two, but three cars, the youngest of which was twelve years old but it didn't really matter. I mean, these were people, we're talking about a group of people who might save up for 10, 15 years in order to buy a bicycle. I mean I visited people who lived in shacks made out of discarded sheets of metal and whatever scraps of wood they could find and yet I found deeper joy in these people than I've ever even remotely seen in the United States. And so I don't think we will ever learn this side of heaven how blessed we are to partner with them. And I've mentioned this many times before, they're not at all afraid to spend the entire night gathered together in Amajapada, India to pray for Grace Fellowship in Port Jervis, New York because they're incredibly wealthy in things of the spirit. And we are, relatively speaking, incredibly wealthy in material things. I'm not saying that to knock us, I'm simply saying we have different gifts and God has enabled us to partner with each other and God blesses that as

well. Paul once said: *If we have sown spiritual things for you, is it a great thing if we reap your material things?* Just like with the early Jews and Gentiles, they need our support and we desperately need theirs. But I've said it before and I'll say it again, we are the ones who are getting the best of this partnership.

So Paul meets with the Jerusalem leadership and he finds out that he's in complete sync with them and he agrees with them wholeheartedly that the one thing that they have absolutely in common is a commitment to serve the poor. And so we consider what God has done thus far in Paul's life. He's taken a man who should have been haunted by his past and crippled by his present, and yet we see none of that. Paul's confidence didn't lie in his ability to forget the past and simply press on or to make up for his failings by stepping up his efforts. Paul knew that none of his best efforts would ever be enough, but that Christ in him crucified would always be enough. Paul's answer to his past and his present was simple: *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 (Galatians 2:20).* See, instead of being haunted by the past or crippled by the present, instead of being fearful of the future, Paul was the exact opposite, he was extraordinarily

bold. So confident was he of Christ within him that this is what he says in verse 11, he says: *But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 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. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 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?"* See, Paul is getting at where the Judaizers were coming from and just how complicated the situation actually is. See what really makes it difficult is these false teachers had aligned themselves up with James who was Jesus's brother and a bishop of the early church and their influence was so great that even Peter was cowed. I mean not only did Peter cut off the fellowship that he once had with the Gentiles, he and some of the other leaders began to follow Peter's lead including even Barnabas. I mean it was a terrible situation. And God clearly had sent Paul in to begin to clean it up. And Paul goes on to say in verse 15: *We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 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.

You see, so tempting was this "plus" of circumcision that these false teachers were offering that even the apostles, even they got caught up in it. And so is it any wonder that we, too, can get captured by it? See, in Paul's day it was a simple thing to simply add a rule here and a rule there and suddenly the gospel is no longer the gospel, it is the curse of the gospel plus. I mean Satan can turn even the simple gospel into a complicated mess. It was Francis Schaeffer who once said if I had an hour to give the gospel to somebody, I would spend the first 59 minutes explaining why they needed the gospel in the first place. He said, then I'd only need a minute to present the gospel. And what complicates it is the fact that the enemy has a playbook for every single person and every single style of church. You know the Corinthians playbook was about sexual sin. James's congregation faced outright persecution. Here the Galatian church was centered around works righteousness. That's a playbook tailor fit for churches like ours. You see, when you are surrounded by a culture that is collapsing and when sexual sins abound in the culture and the culture you find turning hostile against you, it's very easy to see yourself as the good guys facing up to the bad guys in the culture, and it's very easy to lose sight of what the gospel's radical claim really is and that is that nothing, nothing that you and I could

ever do will ever rise to the level of acceptable in God's sight. That's a radical claim. But listen to this radical claim that God makes in *Romans 3* when he says: *As it is written: "None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one."* Now is God saying everything you do is repulsive and evil? No, he's not saying that at all. I mean how could Jesus tell us that a tree is known by its fruit and that good trees bear good fruit and bad trees bear bad fruit if everything we did was anything but evil? And when you consider all of the good things that are done every day by Christians and non-Christians alike, whether it's the Red Cross or Voice of the Martyrs or Save the Children, UNICEF, CARE, World Vision, whatever it is, let's establish the fact that people can do good things. What they can't do is perfect things. And perfection is the only thing that God can call good. Anything less than perfect God must see as not good. When God says in *Romans 3:23: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*, he is describing a bar that is set at the level of perfection. Everything that we do that falls short of God's glory is by definition sin. And by that definition, we are hopelessly inadequate at the task of saving ourselves. So much so that God himself had to become one of us, live the life that we could never live, this life of absolute perfection, and then offer that life as a substitute for our life of sin. That's the concept

that takes 59 minutes to get across. See God is telling us that all of our goodness and all of our efforts and all of our attempts at justifying ourselves through our good deeds are fruitless because they all fall short of the glory of God. Therefore they are all not good. And what God is speaking to here in the gospel plus is doing these things thinking they can justify us.

You know God uses the term "justification." Let me explain what I mean by that. You know, a few years back, some of you who are younger don't even remember this, there was a time when we had to balance our checkbooks. I don't know if you remember what that was all about. So if you remember sitting down and you'd write these really long columns of all the checks that you have outstanding and then you'd put your deposits and if after all of these long struggles and after hours you finally got to the place where your deposits matched your checks, there was this technical term used to describe the fact that your account was balanced. It was called, believe it or not, justified. That meant that -- all it means was that your debits and your credits matched, that you had enough credits to cover your debits. Well, justification is a spiritual term as well. It is a declaration by God to God that on the basis of Christ's finished work on the cross, the just demands of the law have been fully met. Well that's -- that's a lot that we need to get into, but suffice it to say right now that when God declares

that you are justified, what he is saying is that your spiritual debits -- which are your sins -- have been paid in full by Jesus Christ's death on the cross. Your spiritual account is justified. The reason why Jesus was qualified to pay that debt was that he was God and that he was perfect. Jesus went to the cross to offer his life, having lived a life of absolute perfection. It's something completely unknown to you and me and every subsequent son or daughter of Adam. There's virtually nothing in this entire world that is perfect, and we all know that. And we all acknowledge it. We all say, "Hey, nobody's perfect." I mean we also acknowledge that any level of perfection is something that you can strive for, but it's something that you're never going to achieve, no matter what it is. I mean you can go to the Bureau of Standards in Washington D.C. and look for the perfect inch or the perfect meter or anything else for that matter and they'll tell you, well, we can approach perfection, we can come close, but we're never, never going to get there. Perfection is alien to our earthly existence, whether it's physical or spiritual. But perfection is what God demands of us because that's who he is. That's the standard by which he judges. When God says in Romans 3: *There is none good, no not one*, he's not saying that everyone is everything but evil, he is saying that judging by the standard of perfection, there is no one save Jesus, who qualifies, so therefore there is no one who is good or does good, that is, except for Jesus. We have a very

hard time with that concept. We desperately want to offer God something that we do, something we're capable of, something we can take credit for because our pride resents the notion that we are spiritually incapable, and so we invent a gospel plus. I mean it enables us to offer our contribution to our salvation. But God will not have it.

Jesus captured this attitude perfectly in a story he told in *Luke 18*. He said this: *Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men -- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.'* And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." Now there's one thing that stands out in the story that I never understood, the very few times -- first few times that I read it. I mean as I read this and I pictured the Pharisee as some kind of spiritual braggart explaining to anyone who would listen how good he was. But the text points

out that the conversation the Pharisee had was a conversation taking place solely within his own head. Verse 9 says: "*The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself.*" I think about that and I say how many times have we, inside our own heads, thought to ourselves, "God, I thank you that I'm not like those people I see on TV who are mocking and cursing and twerking and doing all of these terrible things. I mean, I don't watch filthy movies, I don't get drunk, I don't smoke pot." Substitute any sin you want. "So you must be thrilled with me; right, God?" Not right at all. I mean the tax collector was a sinful guy, no doubt. I mean tax collectors were considered greedy traitors to their own people. But there's a huge advantage the tax collector had. You see, he had fallen short of the glory of God and he knew it. He simply said, "*God, be merciful to me a sinner.*" The reason why Paul was so adamantly against the gospel plus is because it fed into the notion that we, maybe with a little help from God, essentially save ourselves. That's why Paul said in *Galatians 2:21*: *I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.* He's saying if I can do anything at all to earn my own salvation, then why in the world did Christ have to die? I mean, can you see why Paul is so passionate about defending the Galatians from teachers who would have them believe that salvation is a matter of what you do rather than what Christ has already done? Paul could have easily been haunted by the past that

included murder and blasphemy, but he knew for a fact that Christ took that past to the cross with him. He could have been crippled by a present that rejected him as a substandard apostle with a very checkered past, but he also knew again for a fact that the only one whose opinion really mattered, the only one, proved his love for Paul by dying for him at a time when Paul wanted nothing whatsoever to do with him. And although he should have been filled with fear over a future that was going to include rejection and imprisonment and eventual execution, Paul considered himself blessed beyond measure because he knew he mattered most to the one who matters most. That's why he could say in *Philippians 3:8*: *Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ.* Paul was able to visualize his life as bound up with Christ's so much so that it bled into his daily life.

And that leads me to conclude with this question: Does Christ's life bleed into yours? *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. Let's pray.*

Father, I just -- I thank you for Paul and I thank you for the

example he is to us of a man with an incredibly difficult past, a troubled present and a very, very fear-filled future which was all swept away by the knowledge that you took all of that to the cross and that in Christ he was a new creature. Father, I pray that any of us here who is suffering from thinking that our sins are too great, that they couldn't possibly be forgiven, that we would understand and see from Paul's example that we, too, are new creatures in Christ, that all is gone, the new is here. Give us the grace, the strength and the wisdom we need not only to understand that but to tell it to others, I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.