

Galatians 2: 11-21; "I do not set Aside the Grace of God",
A Sermon for Reformation Sunday, October 28th, 2007,
Preached by Pastor Paul Rendall in the Morning Worship Service.

Every year at this time in the last week of October, the thoughts of millions of people in our society turn to Halloween, trick-or-treating, and giving out candy to little children dressed in cute little costumes, or not-so-cute costumes worn by others. I am sure that for Christians the whole practice of catering to this is questionable; the idea of participation in things which involve witches and goblins and the occult, no matter how innocent it may seem, is not good and at points, not right. I don't mind giving out candy to little children, but I believe that if you are going to participate in these things as a host, it would be good to give out a gospel tract along with it. People need the gospel along with the candy. And it seems questionable to me whether we as Christians ought to participate by taking our children out on that night. Most people in our society have forgotten that Halloween is a slang term for "Hallowed evening", the evening which comes before that which has been called "All Saints Day" in the past. It is a festival of the Roman Catholic Church and it is the evening before this feast that is considered as "hallowed" or holy. The celebration of the Roman church's greatest feasts begins the night before. It was, and is, a special evening in the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church believes in the "Communion of the Saints". And what they mean by that communion is not what you and I as Protestants would believe. They believe that there is a union of faith in Christ of all their faithful, past and present. We, as Protestants would agree that this union exists spiritually because of Christ's placing us all in His body, but we would disagree with what they believe follows from this union. Pope Paul VI puts it this way. "We believe in the communion of all the faithful of Christ, those who are pilgrims on earth, the dead who are being purified, and the blessed in heaven, all together forming one Church." "We believe that in this communion, the merciful love of God and His saints is always attentive to our prayers." One person in an on-line article that I read says, "This is why Catholics honor the saints and pray to the saints." "Actually," she says, "what we are doing is we are asking them to pray for us--to add their prayers to ours, just as we might ask a friend to pray for us." "This is known as "intercessory prayer". "It is because of our belief in the communion of all the faithful in Christ--in this world or in the next--that Catholics pray for the dead, for all those who have died and who are being purified(in Purgatory), that they will soon be granted eternal rest in heaven with God and reunited with all the saints." (Women for Faith and Family website; Helen Hull Hitchcock--Author) I would say that this

is setting aside the grace of God. There is no doctrine of Purgatory taught in the Bible, no indication that dead saints can hear the prayers of living saints here upon the earth, and no indication that people can ever be saved from their sins once they are dead. And I would further say that if these things were true, then Christ died in vain. The dead saints cannot mediate for the living saints. This violates 1 Timothy 2: 6, "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus."

My friends, this morning I stand before you to say that there is another meaning to this last Sunday in the month of October which deserves our consideration and remembrance. And that is the events surrounding Oct 31st, 1517. This was the date when Martin Luther nailed the 95 theses on the door of the Wittenberg Chapel. This is why we remember the Reformation. Why did Luther do it? Why did he undertake to make such a public statement of protest? It was because he saw abuses in the doctrine and practice of the Church of Rome that needed to be addressed. The Church needed reformation in many areas. And he intended to declare that need, and thus to re-establish the true gospel and the true Communion of Saints. This morning I want to focus our attention on this theme; setting aside the grace of God. In doing so, I hope that you will join with me in taking a stand, like Luther did so many centuries ago. I am hoping that through this sermon that you will become convinced to speak to others, even to Roman Catholic relatives, neighbors and friends of the sufficiency of the grace of Jesus Christ alone for salvation. This is the core truth of the Reformation and it needs to be shared. Why do we still protest the doctrine and practice of the Roman Catholic Church even as Luther did? We protest it because it sets aside the grace of God. The Church of Rome is much like the Jewish Church of old, in the days of Paul. She does not understand the implications of what Christ came to do and to bring. The Jews of Jesus' day did not understand the doctrine of justification by faith alone. They added traditions to the Word of God. So too, the Roman Catholic church adds to the pure Word of God with her Popes supposedly speaking infallibly. This is an intolerable abuse of the authority of Christ and His Word, to anyone who knows and has come to experience the reality of the grace of the Lord Jesus; to the person who knows the truth of the Word of God. It destroys all true Christian fellowship; that which is the true Communion of the Saints. It is these traditions which actually nullify and set aside the true grace that leads to salvation. So let us go to the Bible this morning to see why the Reformation was needed and why it is still needed today. I will confine myself to the reasons which our text gives. There are many more reasons, but these will suffice for this morning.

1st- The Reformation was needed because Hypocrisy in True Christians will often lead to Doctrinal Compromise. (Verses 11-14)

This happened in regard to the Apostle Peter in a very practical matter of obedience. "Now when Peter had come to Antioch," Paul says, "I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision." "And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy." "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?' How is it that false doctrine comes into the Church of Jesus Christ? It is when a prominent man in the Church falls into hypocrisy out of fear of other religious men, and as a result, the liberty and truth of the gospel itself is jeopardized. There were, and there are, practical implications to the work of Jesus Christ worked out for us on the cross in terms of our salvation. Jesus Christ broke down the barrier between Jew and Gentile, so that the distinctions between the two groups in terms of their communion with each other were established. The Apostle Peter knew this; he had been eating with Gentiles, the text says, before certain men came from James to him. These no doubt were men who were zealous for the law and they knew that that Christ was Lord and that he was their Lord. But they were holding on to the idea that circumcision and their distinctive separation from Gentiles by observance of the ceremonies and feasts commanded by the law should be observed. Peter was afraid that they would be turned away from their faith in Christ if they saw him associating with and eating with Gentiles. Peter is the man who had received this truth of the gospel coming to the Gentiles in a vision and who went to the house of Cornelius and preached the gospel to him. But now, the desire for acceptance by these Jews who came from James, wanting to be approved of by them, he compromised the truth. They wanted hold on to their old Jewish distinctiveness, and Peter was afraid of confronting the whole group of them and James who was the leader of the church in Jerusalem. It was hypocrisy because our Lord Jesus Christ had clearly given Peter the keys of the kingdom to unlock the door to the Gentiles becoming an integral part of the Church. Peter would associate with them, he would eat with them, but he would not confront James and those who stood with him who were wanting to hold on to the Old Jewish laws in some respects. His hypocrisy was that he was willing to compromise the essential truth of what Christ had died for, in order not to have to confront those who were wrongly holding on to their distinctive

separation from the Gentiles, who they thought were all sinners and all outside the covenant promises of God.

Here, by the way, we have a man who was an Apostle, Peter, and he is being claimed by the Roman Catholic Church to be the first Pope. Here we have one who is supposed to be able to have infallibility of judgment, who is needing to be rebuked by the Apostle Paul. We should see from this that there is no such thing as Apostolic succession or Papal infallibility. It undermines the authority of the very Word of God. It allows error to be propagated unchecked in the true Church of Jesus Christ. Peter was no Pope or the father of the Popes. Christ never appointed Peter to such an office in the Church of Jesus Christ. Come this morning and take your stand with me against it, and clearly speak of it as a grave and fatal error in the Roman Catholic Church. Do not stand passively by and acknowledge that the Pope can speak *ex cathedra* when the supposedly first and greatest of Popes fell into hypocrisy and led many in the early Church astray by his hypocrisy for a time. He even led Barnabas astray, and then finally had to be rebuked by the Apostle Paul. It is no doubt true that Peter repented of his hypocrisy and all was made right in the true Communion of the Saints. But Hypocrisy in true Christians will often lead to doctrinal compromise. We want to be accepted by people around us, but as we examine what others believe, we find prejudices being held by them against other Christians who may not have learned the Way of keeping God's commandments as well as they have. The Christians, then, who are superior in knowledge may not want to have fellowship with those who are going to require teaching and a good example of Christian liberty in the way that they will live. And instead of instructing the young or immature believer in the principles of righteousness and truth, they will want to "be separate" from them. This is a great error in the minds of many Christians. Anyone who teaches must confront it, and must be willing to instruct both of these groups; those who think that they are more mature and those who truly are not. Listen to the words of the Apostle Paul in Galatians 3: 26. "For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus." "For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ." "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." When we put on Christ, we put off our separation and our prejudices against other people groups and live out the gospel with all those who will call upon the Lord Jesus Christ in Truth. It is the truth of the Word that cannot be compromised without compromising the gospel. And that is the reason for the Reformation. That is the reason that we cannot have spiritual fellowship with Roman Catholics. It is that their doctrine is not Biblically sound, and it will not save people from their sins. It is not because we do not long to have fellowship with those who may be true Christians within that

false church. "Come out from them and be separate," God says to all those who are influenced by false systems of doctrine and those who are trying to be saved by taking the sacraments. Come to the Pure Word of God which no man dares add anything to, or take away from it, without being punished eternally in the Lake of Fire. Come to the plain and simple and straightforward Word of God which will not deceive you but will tell you everything that you need to know related to how to have eternal life and how to be godly. Do not submit to the teaching of priests or Popes, but rather come to Jesus Christ.

Now 2ndly- The Reformation was needed because the true Gospel of Jesus Christ was not being preached by the Roman Catholic Church.

(Verses 15-18)

The problem from the early days of the Church has always been the same, whether it was in the early church, at the Reformation, or today. The question has always been, "Is the doctrine of the great salvation which found only in Jesus Christ being preached to the people in all the churches, or is it some modification of the doctrine of works-righteousness?" Verse 15 and following says, "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 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." Now let me speak plainly. The great salvation of God is not for those who believe that they will be saved and have eternal life through the ceremonies and sacraments of any church. We can see very plainly that certain ceremonies were given the Old Testament Church in the law, and she was to obey them. The ceremony of circumcision, given to Abraham, commanded by God to be performed by all the Hebrews in the law, is found in Leviticus 12: 3. But never do we find that the simple performance of that ceremony ever saved one single individual. The proof of this is found in Deuteronomy 29, verses 1-4. The Lord commanded circumcision in the law, and this was performed on all the male children of Israel, but listen to the words of God's evaluation of them. "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb." Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land-- the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders." "Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day." You mean to say to me, that a person can perceive all of this and not be saved? Yes, it is possible. Turn with me to Deuteronomy 10, and verse 15. Here we find the appropriate response of an Old Testament Israelite to all the covenant truth and ceremonies

and wonders done for him by God. "The Lord delighted only in your fathers, to love them; and He chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as it is this day." "Therefore circumcise the foreskin of your heart, and be stiff-necked no longer." That is the response to all that God had done for them in bringing them out of Egypt. They needed to circumcise their hearts. It was not the ceremony of circumcision that saved them.

Similarly, when we come to New Testament times, there is no Levitical Priesthood that exists in the Church, although in Roman Catholicism it appears to still exist. Priests perform the sacrifice of the Mass and say that they regularly are offering sacrifice to God, when all the while the Bible says that "Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are the copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; not that He should offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with the blood of another-- He then would have had to suffer often since the foundation of the world; but now, once at the end of the ages, He has appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself." "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many." He is not offered and sacrificed numerous times in the Mass as though the Roman Catholic priests have to add something to what He has done and accomplished. Away with such blasphemy! These masses will save no one. It is faith in the Lord Jesus and His finished work upon the cross that saves from sin. A man can never be justified, declared righteous in the sight of the holy God by the works of the law; by any ceremonial works or by trying to keep the moral law of God. It will simply not be considered; it will not be meritorious in any sense in God's sight. All of the Christian's good works are wrought in God; that is, that they are acceptable to God if they are done with the believer realizing that they are covered by Christ's blood and the merits of His death and righteous life. This is pleasing to God.

Notice that verse 17 says, "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!" "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor." What does he mean by these statements? The key is in verse 19. "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God." What he is saying is this. In verse 15 he sets the context by saying that he is talking about Jewish people. In that verse he says that they are Jews by nature and not sinners of the Gentiles. In verse 16 he is saying, since we know that a man cannot be justified by the works of the law, "even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law." Even a Jew with all of his religious privileges, and all of the ceremonies performed over him must believe in Jesus Christ. He must come to rest upon Christ's righteousness in regard to everything required for his salvation. There

must not be one whit of his own righteousness, there must not be a ceremony or another person on earth to be trusted to do anything religious for him in relation to salvation except to preach to him the gospel of Jesus Christ. There must be nothing of the works of the law or that person makes Christ a minister of sin. He makes Christ a minister of the law when that person tries to couple his own works, his own righteousness, or some ceremony performed over him, to be added to the perfect work and righteousness of Christ. That is building those things which were once destroyed. The law's demands upon the believer in Christ are destroyed as to adding to what he did. We can add nothing. We transgress if we rebuild the law into the equation as a requirement for justification. The law is a rule of life to the believer after conversion, but there is no condemnation that it brings to the believer. The believer has died to the law in that regard through the law being fulfilled in Jesus Christ. This is in order that we might live to God. We could never live to God when the law is continually pointing out our imperfect works of righteousness, our imperfect thoughts and motives for what we do, our imperfect and incomplete obedience in regard to its precepts. The law's spiritual perfections perfectly represent the Righteous and Holy God and what he expects of every man. But no man can fulfill any of it except through Jesus Christ. This is why Roman Catholicism must be protested against. They are trying to add to what Jesus Christ has done and accomplished perfectly; something of their own works to merit favor with God, and blessing for others. But merit is not to be found in the best of our works let alone in the all the rest. All glory belongs to Jesus Christ for this great salvation. It is not split between Christ and me.

Listen to John Calvin on this. "Furthermore Saint Paul's debating of the case of Ceremonies, is because these hypocrites which took upon them to match themselves with God, and to have the praise of their salvation themselves, did always busy their heads about small trifles, and came not to the chief point, which is to enter into their own consciences." "Like at this day in the Popedom (the Papal government), they that do so much preach their own merits, and say that we must purchase Paradise by our own works, and that although we are sinners, yet we have a way to discharge ourselves to Godward by satisfactions: what allege they?" "When those great Rabbins go about to set men after that manner upon the stage to be honored as Idols, and when they have made their great prefaces of free will, of their own virtues, of their satisfactions, and of their merits or deservings: what bring they?" "Exhort they men to live chastely, without doing other men wrong, or without any covetous desire, so as every of us should content himself with that he hath, be patient in adversity, bear wrongs and reproaches, and in all things show ourselves to be the disciples of our Lord Jesus Christ by forsaking ourselves?" There is not one word with them of these

things." "But the good works which they set before us are, that we must go devoutly to Mass, take holy water before we enter into the Church, becross ourselves, kneel down before a stock, worship a puppet, gad about on pilgrimages, keep such a feastful day, deal doles for the dead, and do this and that." "So then all these hypocrites which will needs become righteous by their own works, have nothing but trinkets and showy trifles: and yet for all that, they think themselves so holy and perfect that nothing is amiss in them." (Calvin's sermons on Galatians; Page 232) Such was Calvin's view of the works required by the Roman Catholic Popes and Priests. I believe that they set aside the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

Then 3rdly and finally- The Reformation was needed in order for each believer in Christ to experience the reality of Christ's life living in them. (Verses 20 and 21)

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." The life of Christ in each and every Christian cannot be known and understood through the rituals and ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. It is known in the heart of each person who has been born again. Have you ever heard of Roman Catholic priests preaching that you must be born again? Very little of it, I would dare say. They believe that regeneration comes through water baptism of the infant, which cannot possibly be true. For if the Spirit of God is at work to bring regeneration to the heart of a sinner, it leads him to confess that he may have gone to church for many years, he may have been taught to go to the Confession, to do penance, to say the Hail Marys and Our Fathers, to say the Rosary and to regard the Pope and His Bishops and Priests with high regard, even with reverence; but those things never led him to saving faith in Jesus Christ. They led him to think that salvation depended upon his doing these religious works to satisfy for his sin. But when any person very simply comes to Jesus Christ confessing their sinfulness and crying out in prayer for mercy, believing that Jesus Christ died so that a sinner could approach the Most Holy God and find acceptance, favor, and blessing; something wonderful happened. Christ came into their heart, in the gift of the Holy Spirit, and now the truth of the Bible came to life and the person became a New Creature. It is Christ who is His life, and that life gives power and grace and strength to live by faith in the Son of God who loved me, and gave Himself for me. And then I humbly follow after Christ through submission to His blessed Word which is the true authority in the Christian life. Do you understand the reality of this, my dear friend, this morning? Only Christ can give Himself to you. He gave Himself for you at the cross so that you might trust in Him and rest your whole soul's weight upon Him. Do not set aside the grace

of God by thinking that the Christian life consists in your being religious. If you truly have Christ, you will be simply, but profoundly, devoted to Him, and through Him to the Father. That is true religion. "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." I hope that you now will see and that you will remember why we needed the Reformation. The real question for each Christian here this morning is; Am I sincerely and really pursuing this life of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, or am I resting in my past knowledge and the things that I have done before in the Christian life? If Christ loved me and gave Himself for me, how will I love and serve Him today?