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Welcome to the New Life Podcast and Ministry of New Life Presbyterian Church in Ithaca, New York. Today we have this week's preached by Tim LaCroix, our senior pastor. Join us for worship each week at 10 o'clock at 950 Danby Road, Ithaca, New York. You can also visit us on our website, www.newlifeithaca.org. Now here's this week's sermon.

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reading from St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians chapter 2 verses 15 through 21. 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 Jesus Christ 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. But if an

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are endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners. Is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not. For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. For through the law, I died to the law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.

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In 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. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. This is the word of the Lord.

01:58

We live in a very anxious time. I don't think I need to establish that fact. There's been many studies recently have talked about the rising levels of anxiety, especially amongst younger people. You know, as I think about anxiety and the things that we do to mitigate it, I think there are basically two ways. Anxiety is essentially, I think,

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If I try to distill it down to what it is, it's definitely fear, but it's a result of a lack of felt security. We don't feel secure. We don't feel safe. So this leads us to be anxious or something about what we're feeling that we don't feel safe and secure. And as I thought about this this week in relation to the text that we're going to talk about today, it seems to me that there are basically two ways that people deal with the insecurity that causes anxiety.

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The one is deprivation and the other is acquisition. So deprivation we may be a little more familiar with. This may be called moralism or legalism. It's basically we're going to create an environment, we're going to control our environment in order to produce a safe environment. Religious people are especially prone to this using rules and laws in order to control the things around us and make us feel safe. We deprive things.

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in order to create an environment to give us security. But the other way we kind of deal with our felt lack of security, our anxieties, acquisition. Acquisition is something the Americans are very familiar with. If we feel that we're not safe or we lack something, we just go get it. If you feel like we're not safe in our homes, we buy a security system. Perhaps we acquire a firearm. If we feel like we don't have financial security, we may just seek to have more money.

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so that we can buy ourselves good health care if we get sick or whatever issue may arise if we have enough wealth. And so many people deal with anxiety by trying to perform and acquire. Hedonism is also a version of this. It's the acquisition of feelings. It's the acquisition of experiences in order to take away the poor feelings that one feels when one has anxiety. And if we think about the two types of mitigation of anxiety,

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There are both religious and secular people who do both of those things. It's not the case that deprivation is only religious people and acquisition is only secular people. I think we

can understand how the first approach to controlling using rules and morals to provide a safe place is religious, but secular people do it too. In fact, secular people can be very moralistic, it can be very legalistic. They can impose rules and mores and ways of being.

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upon other people in their particular worldview. I tried to bring this up last week a little bit and I just briefly mentioned I think I didn't do it too well. But the fact of the matter is, is legalism is not just in the church and religion, it's also in secular society. And acquisition is not just something for secular people. Religious people acquire things too. As Americans we acquire goods to make ourselves feel, well as North Americans, maybe some of you from Canada haven't met all of you.

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We acquire goods in order to make ourselves feel safe, but religious people also acquire something to make them feel safe, and it's spiritual power. The acquisition of spiritual power in order to be able to control an environment and produce the safety that one needs. In fact, any one person might engage in both sides of this. I might use spiritual power to create a safe place. I might use deprivation in order to impose a strict morality, all to reduce my anxiety and give me the illusion of security.

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Now what both of these approaches lack and what they both reveal is that one cannot possibly ever truly gain security through these efforts. If you try to achieve security and safety through acquisition, you can never acquire enough. You'll be acquiring and acquiring and acquiring and working and working and working and earning and earning and earning. If you're seeking pleasure, you have to continually seek pleasure because the high goes away.

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So there's never an end to the toil of trying to reduce your anxiety by acquisition. And the same really is true of deprivation. If you can create a strict legal environment, it never ends. If you let up for just a second, something will get in and destroy the safety you've created. In

other words, human effort cannot do it. And I think if we really look into our hearts, we know this. What's interesting is that

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Therapies that are used to deal with anxiety, cognitive behavioral therapy, exposure therapy to phobias, what they essentially do is try to get your brain to reset, to get rid of an irrational fear and believe something that is real or more real and more true. In other words, and I've said this before if you've listened, what lots of therapies do, talk therapies, is to try to replace lies with the truth.

07:14

And that's part of what we're trying to do here at church. We're trying to get you to replace lies with the truth. What is it then if toil, if effort, if earning will not provide the peace that we seek what will? What will? You know, as I think about the most peaceful people with the least anxiety that I can think of, I think of two different people. The one is a little child, a little baby.

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Not all babies are free of anxiety. Some, sadly, have suffered trauma even in their young lives. But a typical baby is just so trusting, so lacking in anxiety. And the reason why they are, as I've already said, I let the cat out of the bag, they trust. They trust their parents. They believe in their parents' love for them. They simply just be. And they are provided for, and they lack anxiety, and they lack fear.

08:13

person or creature that I thought of was a pet, a dog or perhaps specifically a golden retriever. know pets, dogs, golden retrievers especially, they inherently trust their caregivers. They love them. They don't think they have anxiety unless they've got some other reason. Maybe if they've been abused a little earlier in their life they may have anxiety. But if we think about babies and we think about pets, perhaps we say, it's because they're naive. They don't understand.

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The evils of this world, they don't understand the dangers of this world. Well, yeah, but how's it going for them? I mean, a typical child is, you know, again, not universal, but typically they're doing okay. Their naivety is working out. The only reason why it wouldn't work out is because their parent or their caregiver has a serious failing or is evil in some way.

09:09

So if that principle holds that what we really need is to trust in someone who loves us and has the power and the ability to care for us and protect us.

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then what this text says today is you have that. There is such a person. And that person is Jesus Christ. As we come to the text today, we are coming out of the autobiographical section and we're moving into the meat of Paul's argument. And what we have in verses 15 through 21 is the thesis of the letter. And then what follows, as you'll see over the coming weeks and months as we go through Galatians,

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or arguments. He hits us with this kind of argument. He hits us with that. There's nine different arguments that he puts in place to fortify the central thesis. And the central thesis is that we are justified by faith and not by the works of the law. That is the central theological thesis of the letter. Now, justification is a technical theological term. Right?

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works of the law is another technical theological term. is justification? Well, justification is a legal term. It means to be declared right or innocent. The opposite of justification is condemnation. So if one is not justified, declared right, one is condemned. This is a specific problem that people who believe in a God, a God who created

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the world, a God who has a law and that people transgress it, people like that, which probably includes all of us, would be concerned about being condemned. But in a broader sense, I think the Gospel doesn't just appeal to religious people, I think it appeals to all kinds of people. And if we boil down to what justification is, and condemnation is, I think it comes down to this need for peace, this need for rightness, this need for

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Wholeness, need for safety. And the reality is, that no matter if we're secular or religious, if we're looking for salvation, if we're looking to be freed from condemnation, guilt and shame, or simply we're bearing up under the pressure of performance and what the society says we have to be, either way, the approaches that we have are not working. And what Paul is saying, the only way to find that rightness, that wellness, and that wholeness is through faith.

11:46

Christ and not by human effort. Today we're gonna just walk through this text and I'm gonna pull out some things as we do. You can form a little outline if you're taking notes. By the way, if you would like to see my expanded outline of the book and how we're gonna follow this in this sermon series, you can pull up any of the sermons on the website and I've got a link to an outline. And if you've never done that, I usually...

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put some resources on their links and things if you would like to see them. It's always a good practice to go back and look at that if you like to follow up. So the first thing we see as we look at this text, as we think about what it means to to have justification, to have not only salvation but peace and wellness, the thing that Paul says first is no one can do it. No one can do it. No one can be saved by their own efforts. No one. He starts in verse 15.

12:42

And he says, we are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners. That just seems like an insult. What do you say? Paul is just kind of poking at the Gentiles. Why does he have this little phrase in here? Well essentially what he's saying is, look, and we've said this before, if

anyone could achieve salvation, if anyone could achieve justification, if anyone could earn favor with God, it would be

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the people who follow the law of Moses. It would be the people who are receivers of the promise of Abraham, who had the prophets, who had the law, who had the miracles, who had the kingdom of God. If anyone could do it, it would be them. And so the Jews thought of themselves as righteous because they were followers of the law of Moses and they thought of the Gentiles as sinners. And so he's essentially saying, look,

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We, if anyone could do it, we could. We had the Bible, we had the temple with God's special presence, we had the sacrifices in which God gave His grace to us. We lived very close to Him, all arranged around God's sanctuary in Jerusalem. If anyone could attain righteousness through religion, through effort, it would be us. And then he continues in verse 16. A person

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is not justified by the works of the law. We know this. But through faith in Jesus Christ. And then he says, we also put an emphasis on we. He's talking about Jewish people. People that lived in the old covenant. We also have believed in Christ Jesus in order to be justified. So if they had to do it, everybody has to do it. If the one people that God gave his Bible to

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gave the monarchy, gave the promises, gave the law of Moses, the special place to live, the temple as presence, and everything else that they had. If those people also have to be justified by faith and not by works of the law, then everybody does. There is no one who can do this on their own effort. There is no one who can achieve peace in their own effort. There's no one who can achieve salvation through their own effort.

15:04

The best possible person that you can imagine, which is the example that Paul has given, and we might think of, if you were to think of the best person you can imagine, lot of people think of, like Mother Teresa is something people think of, but maybe you think of something else. The best possible person that you can imagine, they cannot do it. They cannot be justified. They cannot be righteous. No one can. No one can. And so we must be justified. We must find peace.

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security in some other way. And I think we inherently know this, even though we try. We try to appease our anxiety through effort, through work, through toil, whether we're religious or not. We know, I think deep down, we'll never be able to do it. There will never be an end to the labor, to the needing to measure up and perform. It will never ever end. So how do we get it? How do we attain it?

16:03

We attain it because we understand that we are bankrupt. This is one of the things that John Calvin says, and this is in the quotes on page three, the third quote from the top toward the end of the quote. He says, we are, unless we understand that we are poor and destitute of a righteousness of our own, we cannot be justified.

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I rearranged the words a little bit. But that's what he's saying. Unless, until we understand that we are poor and destitute. The gospel is for people who are poor and people who are destitute. The gospel is for people who understand that they have nothing. And one of the issues with people not being able to find peace, not being able to find salvation, or even feel that they need it, is they don't feel their need for it. They don't feel their poverty. We don't feel our

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our lack of any righteousness of any ability whatsoever. In essence, we need to come to that realization. We need to get so tired of the rat race that we want to give up. Or we come to some low in our life or some supernatural, which anyone who's saved is by a

supernatural act of God's grace. Something has to happen to make sinful human beings, fallen human beings, feel their need for God.

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And until we do understand our poverty, we will never be able, we will never be able to find Him. And so the first point is that no one can do it. We need someone to do it for us. And that someone is Jesus. That someone is Jesus. He says that we we also believed in Jesus Christ. We also believe in Jesus Christ. No one is justified by the works of the law, but through faith.

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in Jesus Christ and how does this work? The way it works is that just like we're talking about with the little baby, we have to understand that there is someone who loves us and who gave himself for us and that is the person that we should trust. If we were just to brainstorm what kind of person would we be able to feel safe underneath? Like what kind of a person, if we were to latch ourselves to that person, if we were to

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to be under the protection of that person, the household, under the roof of that person. What kind of person would it be? It be a powerful person. It would be a person who could take on all adversaries and put them aside. It would probably be a wealthy person, someone who could provide all of our needs. It would have to be a loving person, a person that we could trust to do always what is right for us. It would have to be a moral person, someone that we would be able to trust would always do the right thing.

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And we think about all those aspects of someone that we could trust that would never fail us and always be there for us and always protect us. And we start lining up those attributes, we end up at one person. Paul talks about receiving a revelation from Jesus Christ. Paul essentially is staking his entire claim that he received a message from Christ himself. And that Jesus Christ is the person who described in the gospels, who was

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incarnate, the eternal God, the creator of the universe with all power and all wealth imaginable, who became one of us by the Virgin Mary. He was perfectly righteous, he obeyed the law of Moses perfectly, he loves us so much that he gave his life for us. That's the kind of person you can place your trust in. And he proved it by dying on the cross and rising again and ascending into heaven.

19:54

And so Paul is saying, look, the only person you can trust is a person like that. And his name is Jesus. And so we place our trust in him. He says this in the end of verse 20, 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. Someone who sacrifices themselves for you, someone who loves us.

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with an everlasting and unconditional love. That's the kind of person we need and that person is we have in Jesus Christ. Now the opponents were charging Paul with something. We see this in verse 17, with regard to our inability to do it, how works cannot save us and we have to have faith in Christ to save us. The opponent said, if you look at verse 17, look you're making Christ to be an avenue for sin.

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He says in verse 17, but if in our endeavor to be justified by Christ, we too were found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Essentially what these false brothers that we learned about last week were saying is what Paul is taking us backwards. He's taking us away from the righteousness of the law. He's taking us away from the goodness, the moral nature of all these things. And he's actually making Christ to be a servant of sin because he's telling us that we all need to become sinners and then be justified.

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But Paul says it's actually quite the opposite. He said, if our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too are found to be sinners. Is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not. And what he's saying is, it's not Christ who made me a sinner. It's the law who pointed out my

sin. We are all sinners. No matter what kind of religious stuff we put up, he talks about building up, whatever religious facade we built up, whatever rules we felt we could follow that would gain us security,

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would gain us righteousness. They didn't. It didn't work. None of us were justified by keeping the law of Moses. We weren't sinners because of Christ. We were sinners because of the law pointing this out. And Christ came actually to save us from our sin. Christ came actually to deliver us from our need to perform. And so he says in verse 18, for if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. So he turns their argument on its head.

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saying, look, and he's reflecting back to Peter here, the story about Peter that's in the beginning of this chapter. Look, Jesus tore down the wall of separation. Jesus tore down the walls that we built up to protect us from the outside world and protect us from all these insecurities that we felt we had. Jesus tore down that wall. Peter lived into that new reality of freedom where the wall was torn down and he could fellowship with Gentiles and he could eat bacon and shrimp.

22:54

And Paul says if we were to go build that wall back up, we would admit we're wrong. That's sin. So you're actually bleeding us into sin, false teachers. You're trying to build something back up that Jesus tore down. Because no one can do it. No one can do it. We need somebody else to do it for us. And not only can we not do it, we can't even partially do it. We've talked about this before, but the...

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The false teachers were not just saying you need to follow every aspect of the law of Moses But they were basically saying look you were justified by grace, but you're gonna stay in God's favor through works You need to take on these cultural markers these religious things. They keep us safe You know you have to take on circumcision you have to take on

these food laws and keep these holy days That's gonna keep us all safe. That's kept us safe for a thousand years. We cannot disrupt this And essentially what is happening?

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is that the gospel of Christ is exposing their idolatry.

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Oh pastor, you're telling me religion can be doltrous? It can be. It can be. Now you've heard me say before, you've heard me critique the statement that Christianity is not a religion, it's a relationship. You've heard me critique that. And I've said it's both. It is a religion and a relationship. It's both. But it's absolutely the case that people can turn religious performance, rules, a certain way of doing things. Listen...

24:21

If any of you grew up in the church, you know this, people begin to place significance and safety in the way their church does stuff. You know what I'm talking about? The kind of music they sing, maybe the decor in the parlor. Like all these things, and if you try to change it as a pastor, I know, you get in trouble. They call them sacred cows. You know, you don't know what they are, but you find out when you get one. All right? We do this. We build up these kind of structures that help us keep us safe.

24:50

They help us, they keep us secure in our minds and in our hearts. And the gospel exposes that kind of idolatry. The gospel says no, not only can you not earn favor by your own righteousness, you can't even partially do it. It's not there to keep you safe. The law is there to expose us as being needful of Christ. In our tradition, entire Protestant tradition, we...

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we identify different uses of the law. And the first use of the law, which is identified by Martin Luther and also taught by our forebear, John Calvin, the first use of the law is to convict a sinner of their sin. It's to point out our sinfulness. And Paul is stating this over and

over and over. We can't possibly do it. We need someone else to do it for us. We can't even partially do it. There's a quote here.

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about half justification. Actually it's the same quote I was just reading, John Calvin third from the top. Of such half justification, Paul knew nothing. This half justification of a little bit of works and a little bit of grace. This half justification, Paul knew nothing. For when he instructs us that we are justified by faith because we cannot be justified by works, he takes for granted that we cannot be justified through the righteousness of Christ unless we realize our poverty.

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and are destitute of our own righteousness.

26:20

We can't do it, we can't even partially do it. And the next thing we see, the third thing we see is that the law actually brings death. Performance brings death. This is what he says in verse 19. For through the law I died to the law. What does that mean? Through the law I died to the law? What he means is the only thing the law did was point out how dead I was. Through the law I died.

26:49

The only thing the law did was show me how dead I was, it showed me how much of a sinner I was. The only thing the law did was show me my spiritual poverty and my death. The only thing that performance does is lead us to death. Any sort of performance. The need to perform, the need to keep acquiring, the need to keep depriving, whatever it may be, it doesn't lead to life. It only leads to more anxiety, more pressure. The same is true for Paul when he thinks about the law of Moses and the

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the walls that they were putting up around themselves, protect themselves. The law only led to death. But where does life come from? We see in verse 17, as he said, but if in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were found to be sinners. So the law leads us, shows us we are dead. The law shows us we are sinners.

27:43

And then so in applying Christ's death to us, we find life. This is the beauty, and this is probably one of the... This may be the highlight verse of the whole book. It's been turned into songs. It's certainly, if you've ever memorized Bible verses, it's one that you may have memorized. It is verse 20. For I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. You've probably heard that before.

28:12

What Paul is saying is, the law brings death, performance brings death. The only way that we can live is actually to die and to die with Christ and to rely on His death on our behalf to pay for our inadequacy, to pay for our sin, and then be made alive in Christ through His resurrection so that our life we live is in Christ and because of Christ. That is the only way to live. In other words, the only way to live.

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is to put your trust completely in the only person who can ever provide for you and ever keep you safe. The only person who can ever make you righteous because he trades your sinfulness with his righteousness and puts his righteousness on us like we were putting on a garment. The only way that we can stand justified before God is if we recognize our spiritual poverty and we rely completely on Christ alone.

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to be our life and our salvation. The law brings death, but applying Christ's death brings us life. This brought a retort. This brought a retort from Paul's opponents as we see in verse 21. He says, I do not nullify the grace of God. For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose. Again, one last

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counter-argument to the idea that we have to have the works of the law, human effort to be righteous. He says, look, if righteousness, the works of the law could save us, then Christ died for no purpose. Why did he die? Why did he give his life? Roger and Nicole, this is a quote on page three of your bulletin. It's a little provocative just to warn you. But Roger and Nicole said this, if you can save yourself by your own works, then Jesus' death is not loving, it's pure stupidity.

30:12

Why would he do that? If there was any way we could save ourselves by our works, why would he do such a thing? Why would the Lord of Life, the most valuable entity in the entire universe, give himself up if we could be saved at all through our own effort? But he concludes, if however you are lost and dying and unable to save yourself, his death means everything. And of course the latter part is true. Applying Christ's death brings us life.

30:41

The last point is this, life and grace is true holiness. As anyone who hears this message of free grace alone without human effort, the first response is, well, what is the reason why we would obey God? What is the reason why we would ever strive to do anything, to achieve anything in life? Why wouldn't we just sit down and do nothing and just depend on Jesus? Well, because we live in Christ.

31:10

And as we live in Christ, we live according to His ways and His desires for us. This is what it says in verses 17 and 18. If in our endeavor to be justified in Christ, we too were to be found sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? For if I rebuild what I tore down, I prove myself to be a transgressor. So in other words, we are shown not to be able to

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be holy in and of ourselves. But in verse 20 we see this, I have been crucified over 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. In other words, Paul says, I do live. I do seek to live. I do seek to obey

Christ. I do seek to obey God. But the reason why I do it is not because I'm trying to earn favor.

32:09

It's because I am responding to His love. I am responding to His sacrifice. I am one with Him. Why in the world would I want to do anything opposite to Christ? Why would I want to go back to the way I used to be? No, life and grace is not license. It's not an opportunity to live according to what you want. Life and grace means no. You live according to the power of Christ. You obey Him not because you need to prove yourself, but because

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you are responding to a person who loves you and gave his life for you. The life I live, I live unto God in Christ. You know, I was thinking about the song we just sang a few moments ago, there's a fountain filled with blood, and I have some friends who are in the media business and they used to be very strong Christians and

33:07

And now they deconstructed and now they're kind of wandering around. But one of the things they took issue was they grew up singing that song. And they mentioned this and I think they're actually going to write some sort of song about it. But they took objection to this fountain filled with blood. To a non-Christian, this seems like a fountain filled with blood. That's gross. That's awful.

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How could you relish in something like that? A fountain filled with blood? This is obscene. This is gruesome. Why do you need a fountain filled with blood? Why do you sing about it? Why do you praise God for it? This is awful. And yeah, I mean, think at first glance, you might say, yeah, you're, I mean, that's okay, fine. We won't talk about fountains filled with blood anymore. But just think about it a second. Why do we need a fountain filled with blood?

34:04

As we look at the world, the world is awful. The world is fallen, the world is broken. There's so much pain, there's so much suffering. We're not the ones making a fountain filled with blood. The world is that way. It is a world filled with blood. It is a world filled with suffering. It is a world filled with pain and disease. It is a world filled with sin and evil. Mouth treatment and abuse. Why do we need a fountain filled with blood? Because we need something that can set aside the world of blood.

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And the only thing that can is a sacrifice of Jesus Christ. We glory in this fountain filled with blood because by His sacrifice, we can be saved and our entire world is being renewed and redeemed. Not by our own efforts. It will never be. Not by the efforts of any king or prince or government or army. It can only ever be by the saving work of Christ, His power, His authority.

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and his death on our behalf. Place your trust in that, glory in that, and you can have the peace that your soul longs for. Let's pray. Thank you for listening to this week's podcast. Please rate and review us on your podcast service and share with anyone who may be interested.

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