



## **“Did Jesus Die in Vain?”**

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It's my privilege to speak to you today from the word of God. I'm glad you're here to spend some time with me in study of God's word. I want to turn to a passage in **Galatians 2** that will serve as our text for today's lesson.

**Galatians 2:20-21** “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”

This verse ends with quite a proposition: if certain things are true, then Jesus died in vain. Such a thought would make any Christian recoil, but Paul says that it indeed is possible that the Lord Jesus Christ shed His blood and suffered that horrible death on the cross of Calvary for nothing. Could it be that something that you or I practice or believe in effect makes that the case? Did Jesus die in vain? We'll take up that question in today's study.

That Jesus lived and died by crucifixion are facts that no serious person denies. The crucifixion of Christ is iconic of Christianity; without His death and subsequent resurrection, there would be no gospel (**1 Corinthians 15:1-6**), no new covenant, no New Testament church, and simply put, there would be no Christianity. It is that central to Christianity. The death of Jesus was not incidental. It was certainly not accidental.

**Revelation 13:8** “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”

**1 Peter 3:18** “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit:”

All Christians and most who claim to be Christians believe that Jesus died for sin and that redemption for sin comes through the cross. But could it be that Jesus died in vain? Could it be that His death was unnecessary and meaningless? We want to recoil at such a thought, but would you believe that Paul said that IS possible? There ARE circumstances that render the death of Christ on the cross null and void. The word *vain* means *empty, worthless, useless*. Paul says that if certain things are true, that would make it a

waste of life and a wasteful shedding of blood when Jesus came down and offered up His life on the cross.

First of all, if we are still living under the Old Testament, then it is true that Christ died in vain. Paul says this in our text.

**Galatians 2:21 “...for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”**

When you see the word *law* in the New Testament, especially with the definite article *the* before it (unless otherwise qualified), it is referring to *the Mosaic law*, *the Old Testament law*, *the old covenant* that the Jews lived under up until the time of Christ. The apostle Paul teaches in no uncertain terms that we have been freed from that law.

**Romans 7:1-3 “Know ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth? For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress: but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.”**

Here, Paul simply states the rule concerning marriage, and that is that we can only have one living spouse at a time. He says that if I am married to somebody that I cannot be joined to another unless the first person that I am married to dies. His intention is not to preach a sermon on marriage, but he says this for illustrative purposes. Let's read on.

**Romans 7:4-6 “Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law (referring to the old covenant), did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.”**

Paul goes on to show how that the law was not able to deliver from sin. We were never able to be free from sin while living under that law. Therefore, we were under a continual cloud of condemnation, a yoke of bondage. But the apostle Paul teaches that that law was done away that we might now be married unto Christ. We now live under a NEW covenant; we have a NEW agreement. We are now subject to a NEW law that came through the Lord Jesus Christ. When, where, and how did this law that Paul is talking about in **Romans 7** die, so to speak?

**Colossians 2:14 “Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross;”**

So, at the cross of Jesus Christ, God took that law that was *against us*, *contrary to us*, under which we were only condemned and could not be saved, and **“took it out of the way.”** Well, that begs the question: why did God give the law to the Jews in the first place? If it was merely a temporary law, that was unable to save, why did God give it? Paul goes a long way to answer that question. In **Galatians 3**, he contrasts salvation through faith in Jesus Christ with the attempt to be justified under the Old Testament law.

**Galatians 3:23 “But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.”**

Paul says that before the system of justification by faith—this faith that was revealed by Jesus Christ—**“we were kept under the law.”** He is talking about the Jews here.

**Galatians 3:24-25 “Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”**

Paul uses an interesting term here. He says that **“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.”** *Schoolmaster* doesn't mean a teacher; it refers to a *tutor* or a *guardian*. In that ancient time and

culture, it referred to someone who essentially made sure that the pupil was taken to the teacher in order to be taught. He was charged with the well-being and safety of that pupil until he could be brought to the feet of the teacher, brought to the school, so to speak, in order to learn. The apostle says that ***“the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ.”*** But notice that he then says *now that that faith is come, now that we are saved through obedient faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, now that the new covenant has come, “we are no longer under a schoolmaster.”* How much plainer can it be? The authority of the law has been lifted, taken out of the way, because its purpose was fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and now we live under His authority, under His law, under a new covenant that He inaugurated. So, should we try to keep the Old Testament today? Are Christians supposed to keep its ordinances? Should we be using the Old Testament law and the examples of temple worship, for instance, as examples for how we should worship today? Should we be keeping the Ten Commandments? Many believe that that is the case. Many believe that we should view the sabbath day as holy, like the Jews were required to do. But there is no commandment in the New Testament enjoining the sabbath day upon Christians. Never was a Gentile in the New Testament commanded to keep the sabbath day. That was a day that was commanded for the Jews to keep holy back during that other dispensation of time, and that law has been taken out of the way.

Many say that we may use instrumental music in worship because we read of people doing so in the Old Testament. We read of people praising God using various instruments in the Old Testament and surrounding temple worship and so forth. Many today look to special men as priests, separate from other believers, to have their sins absolved. Much like existed under the Old Testament when the priests waited in the tabernacle on behalf of the people. Well, what does Paul say about all of that?

**Galatians 2:21 “I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.”**

Again, he is talking about that Old Testament law that included circumcision and all of the various rites and ceremonies of Moses. The reason Paul said this is that the Galatian church was beset by Judaizers. Judaizing teachers were trying to bind Old Testament circumcision upon Gentile Christians. So, Paul says that if we can be justified by keeping that old law, then there was no reason for Jesus to die, because He came to die in order to take that law out of the way.

Well, secondly, if we are saved outside of the church, then Christ died in vain. It’s a very popular notion today. Most people believe that a person can be saved whether they have any involvement in any church or not. Many boast that they love and serve Jesus while proclaiming that they are not a part of “organized religion.” Did you know that, according to the New Testament, you cannot be saved without being a part of Christ’s church? Now, I did NOT say that being a part of the church saves you, but that you cannot be saved without being a part of Christ’s church. It’s true that the church doesn’t save; there is no saving power in the church itself. But the Bible teaches that *the Lord adds to the church daily such as should be saved (Acts 2:47)*. Anyone who is saved is added by the Lord to the church. What do we read about that church in **Acts 2**?

**Acts 2:41-47 “Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”**

Those people who were baptized, saved, added to the church continued in church life, you might say. *The Lord adds to the church daily such as should be saved* and that means to be saved is to be in the

church. And to be in the church means to be serving the Lord within the church. The church consists of the saved, and that's what makes it the church. The church by definition is the assembly of Christ. That simply refers to those who have been called out of the world by Christ, those who have been saved from their sins by being baptized into Christ, having His blood wash their sins away, and by essence of that transaction, they are added to the church by the Lord. The Lord recognizes them as part of His assembly, part of the saved, part of the church here upon this earth.

**Acts 20:28 "Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood."**

You see, Jesus died and gave His precious blood to purchase and redeem the church. Yet we are to believe that our salvation has nothing to do with it? No, the church doesn't save, but friend, the saved are in the church. If Jesus died in order to purchase the church, what are we saying if we say that one can be saved and NOT be part of the church? Can't you see that we are negating the death of Jesus Christ—what He died to accomplish—if we say such a thing?

Thirdly, if denominationalism is all right, then Christ died in vain. Today, most people accept denominationalism as an unavoidable fact and reality. But let's notice some scriptures about the church.

**Matthew 16:18** Jesus speaking: **"And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."**

What did He NOT say? He did NOT say, "I will build my churches." He didn't say He would build a myriad of denominations. He didn't say He would build John Calvin's church, John Wesley's church, John Smith's church, Mary Baker Eddy's church, or Ellen G. White's church. He said, **"upon this rock I will build my church."**

**Acts 2:41 "Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls."**

Added unto what?

**Acts 2:47 "Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."**

Added to the church. Jesus prayed in His great prayer of **John 17** for that church, for those who would become disciples by the preaching of His apostles, to always remain ONE.

**John 17:20-21 "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me."**

Yet, what do we have today? We have division. So much division that it's mind boggling. It's dizzying. Why do we have literally hundreds of religious organizations in America alone that all claim to be the church that Jesus built? Where do those divisions come from? They come from departures from the original plan of Christ. Jesus didn't build all of those churches. He didn't authorize all of those churches. You can't take the word of God and simply believe and practice what it says and come up with all of those churches because all of those churches are contrary one to the other. They all teach different and conflicting doctrines. That didn't come from Christ.

Yet people will say things like, *denominations are just different expressions of faith in the same God...There are saved people in ALL denominations... It doesn't matter what you believe about doctrine... It doesn't matter how the church operates or worships...* But is that how God looks at it? The Bible teaches that Jesus has **"broken down the middle wall of partition"** between Jews and Gentiles.

**Ephesians 2:14,16 "For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us...And that he might reconcile both (Jew and Gentile) unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby:"**

You know, if God had ever wanted to have a system of denominationalism, if it had ever been in His plan or design to have differing churches for people of different religious persuasions, we would've seen a

Jewish church and a Gentile church. We'd have seen two distinct organizations within the first century. But God didn't do that. God brought them together in one body. Some will allege that there really were denominations. In fact, some say that the Jerusalem council that we read about in **Acts 15** is a record of the first denomination when instructions were given to the Gentiles. Friends, that is nonsense. The apostles came together there to find a peaceable solution to an issue that arose due to the Gentile's new entrance into the kingdom of God. They weren't setting up a denomination or segregating the church. They weren't founding a new church or some kind of Gentile denomination. Friend, there is no such thing as a denomination or anything akin to a denomination in the word of God. We've got to get back to a unity that is described in the scriptures, the unity of the New Testament church, and the only way to do that is by getting back to the New Testament. The closest you will find to denominations and various groups holding to contrary ideas and following various theologians and movements in the first century is in **I Corinthians 1**.

**I Corinthians 1:10-13 "Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"**

My friend, Jesus died for one church. He only built one church. He is only the head over one church. He is the Saviour of one church. That is the church that belongs to Him that is described in the New Testament. No, one church is NOT as good as another. One is NOT as right as another.

Denominationalism and institutionalized religious and doctrinal segregation are opposite of the message of the cross. If Christ, by the cross, tore down the wall of partition that segregated Jews and Gentiles, what have men done with their human creeds, confessions, manuals, disciplines, and so forth? What are they doing when they form religious organizations with human names and humanly devised practices and call them all 'churches of God'? Friend, they are negating the very thing that Jesus Christ came to earth to do away with by His death. Therefore, making Jesus to have died in vain.

The question before us today is one that we should ponder very seriously in our own hearts. Did Jesus die in vain? Could it be that the way we are living, our disposition toward the gospel, could be making that true? What a terrible thing it would be to stand before the Lord Jesus Christ in the Day of Judgment to see the nail prints in His hands, and to know that they were placed there, so far as you or I are concerned, in vain. Today, if you would respond to the overtures of Christ's love and mercy, surrendering your life to Him in gospel obedience, it would be our joy to help you take those steps. We hope to hear from you today if you desire to be baptized into Christ and begin living a new life in Him.

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