

"Works and Faith"

Devotional Reading: Galatians 2:1-10 **Background Scripture:** Galatians 2:11-21

Galatians 2:11–21 (NIV)

¹¹ When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. ¹³ The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

¹⁴ When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

¹⁵ "We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles ¹⁶ know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.

¹⁷ "But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn't that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! ¹⁸ If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.

¹⁹ "For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. ²⁰ I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. ²¹ I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

LESSON AIMS

- **Learning Fact:** To understand that the truth of the gospel is demonstrated through our love for others.
- **Biblical Principle:** To know that our life is founded in Christ who gave His life for us.
- **Daily Application:** To live so that the gospel is seen in and through us.

LESSON CONTEXT

Unlike many of his letters, Paul did not address the book of Galatians to the church in a particular city. Galatia was a Roman province in the central highlands area of modern Turkey. Paul and Barnabas had evangelized this area on the first missionary journey, including the cities of Pisidian Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 13–14). See "The First Missionary Journey of Paul" Map: log in at <https://www.jesusisall.com/amember3/>, Set 18, Map#119. These cities were the recipients of the book, which was intended to be circulated among them and read to all the churches (Galatians 1:2).

Galatians very likely was written several years after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, which took place around A.D. 51. Many scholars believe that Galatians 2:1–10 is Paul's account of what happened when he attended that council. In this passage, Paul noted that those church leaders had nothing to add to his message (2:6) and that God had ordained Paul to preach to Gentiles as Peter was chosen to preach to Jews (2:7).

Not everyone was on board with this arrangement. Some Judaizers had infiltrated the churches founded by Paul. They taught the members that they were required to follow the Jewish law (Galatians 2:4). Despite the decision of the Jerusalem Council, this Judaizing had continued. The churches were confused. Was the Law of Moses still in effect? Paul's exposition of this matter is the heart of the book of Galatians.

Dissonance: Galatians 2:11–14

Apparently, sometime after the important conference described in Acts 15, Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch. The exact time is not stated in verse 11 of today's lesson. However, it was certainly after Peter's vision at Joppa (Acts 10:10-16) and his experience in the home of Cornelius (Acts 11:1-8). Peter knew that God is no respecter of persons and that ceremonial uncleanness was a thing of the past. The fact that Paul *opposed* Peter tells us that this was a *face to face* confrontation between the two apostles. Paul set himself against Peter, resisting and reprimanding him. Peter incurred reproach by his own inconsistent conduct, and he stood self-condemned without any defense *because he* was to be blamed for being a hypocrite.

In verse 12 of today's lesson we see the reason for Paul's rebuke. Paul tells us that before these *certain men* came to Antioch, Peter (raised as an orthodox Jew) was in the habit of eating with the Gentiles; his habit was to publicly fraternize with them. God had revealed to Peter that the Levitical legislation regarding certain foods had been set aside. In obedience to God's revelation, Peter laid aside the obsolete Jewish custom and was eating with the Gentiles. However now, when these certain Jewish men visited *who belonged to the circumcision group*, somehow they exerted a tremendous influence on Peter. We see that Peter *began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of these men*. It seems like Peter had a difficult time learning this lesson. Peter's freedom was threatened by Peter's "fear."

His actions were blatant hypocrisy. Exactly why Peter feared this delegation is not stated. But his failure to live up to his earlier commitments (Acts 11:1-18) reveals a double-mindedness regarding Gentiles, or at least a weakness of follow-through on what he believed to be true.

1. Why did Paul confront Cephas (Peter)? (Galatians 2:11-12)

What Do You Think?

How do you decide whether to confront someone directly about his or her behavior?

Digging Deeper

In what situations might a less direct approach be more beneficial to the misbehaving person?

Paul's language is particularly harsh! The pervasiveness of the hypocrisy is shown when Paul mentions that other Jews followed the example of Peter, who was trying unsuccessfully to play both ends against the middle without letting either the Gentiles or the Jews know exactly what he was doing. Even *Barnabas* (Paul's co-laborer, Acts 4:36; 11:22-24), and "son of encouragement" had become involved and *was led astray*.

Peter himself had stated at the Jerusalem Conference that God had 'made no distinction between us and them' (Acts 15:9). But now Peter was putting a difference. God's people are one people, even though they may be divided into various groups. Any practice on our part that violates the Scripture and separates brother from brother is a denial of the unity of the body of Christ.

2. What influence did Peter's actions have on others in the fellowship? (Galatians 2:13)

What Do You Think?

In what situations do you feel intimidated? How do you change the way you speak and act at those times?

Digging Deeper

When you feel pressure to change for others, what helps you take an authentic approach that is consistent with your values?

Paul's confrontation with Peter was not a small issue of favoritism and social practice. This matter cuts to *the truth of the gospel* of Jesus Christ. To be Christlike is to treat others the way Christ treats us. God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to the offer of salvation (see Acts 10:34-35; 15:9; Romans 2:11). If God makes no distinction, neither should we.

Paul severely and publicly rebukes Peter for his inconsistency and his insincerity. Paul, vested with divine authority, took Peter to task and unsparingly, but tactfully, rebuked him. Peter did not try to defend himself, but graciously accepted the well-deserved rebuke and later referred to "our dear brother Paul" (2 Peter 3:15-16).

Paul asks Peter a pointed question. "You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile. Now you want the Gentiles to live like Jews. What kind of inconsistency is that?" Paul's words must have stung Peter.

3. How was the confrontation of Peter a matter of the truth of the gospel? (Galatians 2:14)

What Do You Think?

How does your congregation demonstrate your welcome of people from all nationalities?

Digging Deeper

In what areas could this welcome be made more apparent?

Gospel: Galatians 2:15–21

Paul now holds Peter accountable to the doctrine of justification by faith. Here Paul states that *Jews* who were born with special privileges and prerogatives, regarded all Gentiles as *sinners* without restraint of the law (v. 15). However, the Gentiles (v. 16) “know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we (Jews), too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law.”

Justification is the judicial act of God whereby He declares righteous those who trust in Christ. It is the reversal of His attitude towards the sinner because of the sinner’s new relationship to Christ. God did not condemn, now He acquits. This means that all the guilt and penalty of the believer is removed forever (Romans 8:1) and that the perfect righteousness of Christ is imputed to him from the works of the law, not resulting from man’s deeds of obedience. The standard of the law was so exacting that no one (except Christ) ever kept it, and so the broken law could only condemn (Romans 3:19-20). No one is justified except through faith in Jesus Christ. Salvation is wholly by divine mercy (Titus 3:5) and not by human merit.

4. What did Paul mean by “a person is not justified by the works of the law” (Galatians 2:15-16)?

The Judaizers’ question might look like this: If keeping the law is not a requirement for Christians, do we not open a door for all the sinful vices of the Gentile world? In other words, if we reduce the law’s power, are we not saying that anything goes?

Paul perhaps knew what some were thinking and addressed the same question from a different perspective here in verse 17: Paul said that they were sinners already in spite of being Jews. Christ simply revealed to them the fact of their sin. Since grace does not encourage men to sin (Romans 6:1-2), Christ is not a minister or promoter of sin by causing us to abandon the law as a means of justification. *Absolutely not!* This is Paul’s rebuttal to the argument of the legalist that salvation in Christ is insufficient.

5. What did Paul mean by “doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin?” (Galatians 2:17)

After Paul had spoken that justification is only by faith in Christ plus nothing, it will be folly to seek righteousness by keeping the law. This will be building up again that which was *destroyed* (v. 18). Paul said that he *really would be a lawbreaker* if he denied the absolute sufficiency of Christ.

Paul goes on to say in verse 19 that it is not through *the law* that one finds life. Paul’s experience with the law in fact taught him that the law is a *dead* end. No one can be saved by the law because no one can keep it fully and perfectly.

But Jesus’ death and resurrection have given us the means to *live for God*. If our focus is on keeping rules rather than serving God, we will be unsuccessful. We will find that our attempts are imperfect and bear only the “fruit for death” (Romans 7:5). But when a person is born of the Spirit, he or she has a new life (John 3:6).

6. How did Paul show that trying to keep the law was a dead end? (Galatians 2:18-19)

Verse 20 of today’s lesson is Paul’s personal testimony, which may be repeated by every believer in Christ (also see Romans 6:3-11).

Being *crucified with Christ* is an action that began in the past and has continuing effects in the present and future. Here, in his own person, Paul describes the spiritual life of a believer. The old self is crucified (Rom. 6:6), but the new self is living; sin is mortified, and grace is quickened. The believer has the comforts and the triumphs of grace; yet that grace is not from themselves, but from Christ. Believers see themselves living in a state of dependence on Christ. Therefore it is, that though Paul lives in the flesh, yet he does not live after the flesh. Those who have true faith, live by that faith; and faith fastens upon Christ’s giving Himself for us. Always remember, *the Son of God* loves you, and gave Himself for you!

7. What does it mean to be crucified with Christ? (Galatians 2:20)

What Do You Think?

What evidence do you see that Christ lives in you?

Digging Deeper

In what areas do you see the Spirit at work recreating you in Christ’s image?

In verse 21 of today's lesson, the Judaizers wanted to mix law and grace, but Paul tells us that this is impossible. To go back to the law means to "set aside" the grace of God.

Peter had experienced God's grace in his own salvation, and he had proclaimed God's grace in his own ministry. But when he withdrew from the Gentile Christian fellowship, he openly denied the grace of God.

Grace says, "There is no difference! All are sinners, and all can be saved through faith in Christ!"

But Peter's actions had said, "There is a difference! The grace of God is not sufficient; we also need the Law."

Returning to the Law nullifies the Cross: "if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!" (Gal. 2:21). Law says DO! Grace says DONE! "It is finished!" was Christ's victory cry (John 19:30). "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast" (Eph. 2:8).

If we seek to be saved by good works—by our attempts at self-righteousness—then we must realize we are still in our sins and have no promise of life.

8. What did Paul mean by "I do not set aside the grace of God" (Galatians 2:21)?

What Do You Think?

How can you bear witness to the gospel to a nonbeliever who is generally regarded to be a "good person"?

Digging Deeper

Who in your life would benefit from this witness?

POINTS TO PONDER

1. God's people are one people, even though they may be divided into various titled church groups. We are one body in Christ (Galatians 2:11-12).
2. God makes no distinction between backgrounds when it comes to the offer of salvation (vs. 13-14; 3:28).
3. The only possible way to be justified (forgiven by God) is through faith in Jesus Christ (vs. 15-16).
4. If our focus is on being a better person by keeping rules rather than serving God, we will be unsuccessful (vs. 17-19).
5. By uniting with Jesus Christ through faith in Him, we have a renewal that leads to becoming who God really created us to be! (vs. 20-21).

CONCLUSION

Life in Christ

Today, we should consider our own conversion. We must never forget the love and grace which Christ gave you and I in dying to pay sin's price. Therefore we should treat others with the same grace that He has given to us. Our lives should not be guided by fear of others or a need for prestige, nor by the customs that defined our old, sinful lives. Our life is found in Christ. Our faith is lived out in surrender, trust, and obedience to the will of Jesus, who gave His life for us. This is the motivating factor that changes how we see others. It informs how we react to pressures from others; it frees us from the false doctrine that any self-effort can lead to salvation.

Let us continue in God's grace, demonstrating the truth of the gospel through our love for our brothers and sisters in Christ (John 13:35).

PRAYER

Heavenly Father, help us live consistently for You so that Your gospel might be seen in and through us. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Christ's love moves us to welcome all the faithful to the table.