Galatians Lesson 2 (2024)

**FAITH IN CHRIST JESUS ALONE**

Galatians 2:11-3:14

Key Verse: 2:20

“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.”

In the preceding, 1:1- 2:10, we reflected on the fierce battle the Apostle Paul was in for our freedom in Christ Jesus. In the early days, certain Jewish believers in Jerusalem contended that faith in Christ alone was insufficient for the Gentiles to gain justification from God. According to them, adherence to the Law of Moses, including circumcision, was necessary. Paul strongly opposed this perspective, defending the pure gospel centered on faith in Christ Jesus. Following his initial missionary journey, Paul sought confirmation from the apostles in Jerusalem to ensure unity on the fundamental truths of the gospel. The apostles endorsed Paul’s apostleship and gospel message, marking a significant triumph for Paul and the early Christian communities. However, the battle for Christian freedom persisted.

Today’s passage begins with a strong disagreement between two prominent leaders in the early church – Paul and Peter (2:11-14). This was not a minor dispute over trivial matters but a clash at the heart of the gospel itself. Driven by unwavering conviction, Paul confronted Peter for hypocritical actions compromising the gospel truth's essence. As we engage in today’s passage, let’s closely examine how Paul passionately defended the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ Jesus alone. Throughout the text, Paul’s stance remains crystal clear: Salvation is not something we can earn by following rules or laws; instead, it’s a divine gift accessible to all through faith in Christ Jesus alone.

Look at verses 11-14. “When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face because he stood condemned. 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. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy so that by their hypocrisy, even Barnabas was led astray.” In these verses, Paul recounts an incident in Antioch involving Peter (Cephas). Previously, in Jerusalem, Peter and Paul had agreed on the singular truth of the gospel application to all believers, whether Jew or Gentile. This unity was a significant victory for Paul and the earth church. However, when Peter visited the mixed community of Jewish and Gentile believers in Antioch, things took a turn.

Initially, Peter freely associated with Gentile believers, sharing meals with them. The problem arose when some visitors from James in Jerusalem, representing a more traditional stance, arrived. Out of fear of this group, Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentile believers. This sudden behavior change conveyed a conflicting message about including Gentile believers in the body of Christ. Sadly, Peter’s actions influenced other Jewish believers, and even Barnabas, Paul’s close companion, was led astray by this hypocrisy. The incident highlighted the challenges of maintaining a unified and inclusive community of believers.

Why did Peter behave this way? Was it because he doubted the gospel? No, not at all. Peter knew that God accepted everyone based on their faith in Christ Jesus. However, understanding the gospel intellectually in his head and putting it into action were two different things. His old tendency toward legalism resurfaced, driven by the fear of individuals sent from James in Jerusalem. Peter wanted to avoid criticism, being labeled as unorthodox, or straying from traditional beliefs.

Imagine being in Peter’s shoes – a big-shot leader in a traditional religious community. The fear of being seen as unorthodox or too open-minded (or liberal) can lead to severe consequences. It could mean losing influence, credibility, reputation, and community support. The fear of being labeled unorthodox can also affect personal well-being, causing stress and emotional strain. Acknowledging these potential downsides helps us understand just how significant Peter’s fear was, and it unfortunately led to him making some poor decisions. Peter’s situation highlights the challenges of standing up for the gospel's truth within a rigid community. On the flip side, we can’t help but admire Paul’s strong and fearless commitment to the gospel truth, even in the face of challenges.

When Paul saw Peter acting hypocritically, he didn’t just feel sorry for him. Instead, he directly addressed the issue, saying, *“Hey, Peter, you’re a Jew, but you’ve been living like a Gentile. Why, then, are you pressing the Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?”* Although some of us might think that Paul shouldn’t have challenged Peter publicly. We also see that Paul didn’t attack or mock Peter; he simply pointed out the inconsistency in his actions. This teaches us the importance of pointing out mistakes without resorting to harsh judgment or condemnation.

In verses 15-21, Paul talks about the idea of being made right with God through faith alone and compares it with the pointless effort of trying to be right with God by following the Jewish law. Let’s check out verses 15 and 16. “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles 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.” In these verses, Paul stresses that no one can be justified by human efforts or the works of the law. It’s all about relying on faith in Jesus Christ.

In verses 17 and 18, Paul addresses a possible argument from those who insist on following Jewish laws. Look at verses 17 and 18. “If, while we (Jewish believers) seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker.” These verses can be tricky to understand, especially in the NIV translation. The New Living Translation (NLT) makes it more straightforward. “But suppose we seek to be made right with God through faith in Christ, and then we are found guilty because we have abandoned the law. Would that mean Christ has led us into sin? Absolutely not! Rather, I am a sinner if I rebuild the old system of law I already tore down.” Paul defended the idea that seeking righteousness through faith doesn’t lead to sin; going back to the legalistic ways would be a contradiction. It emphasizes Paul’s belief that relying on faith for justification doesn’t encourage sinful behavior.

But there’s a lingering issue. Why? Because we can’t just toss aside the law; it’s from God. So, how do we deal with God’s law? Ignoring it is out of the question. Paul explains it in verse 19 in a profound way. Let’s read verse 19. “For through the law, I died to the law I might live for God.” In this verse, Paul expressed the transformative impact of faith in Christ. In simpler terms, Paul was saying, *“Thanks to faith in Christ, I left behind the law and started living a life dedicated to God.”* Paul emphasizes the significant shift from a legalistic approach to life to a life rooted in faith and devotion to God. ***(A change from legalism to faith in Christ)***

In verses 20-21, he continues to elaborate what he said in verse 19. Read verse 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.” In this verse, Paul was saying something profound. He’s explaining that he connects with the idea of Jesus dying on the cross. What does it mean? It means his old way of living, where he was hyper-focused on following every rule and law perfectly, is a thing of the past. Now, it’s all about living a new life that reflects Christ’s life and teachings. He highlights a major shift – he’s not living for himself anymore. Instead, it’s Christ’s presence within him that guides his actions. His life is about trusting Jesus, who loved him so much that he made the ultimate sacrifice on the cross. It’s a complete transformation from a legalistic life to a life shaped by faith in Christ Jesus.

In verse 21, Paul makes a critical point: He says, “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing.” He pointed out that if we could be perfect alone, Jesus wouldn’t need to sacrifice himself for our mistakes. But because we can’t be perfect, God’s grace becomes how we become right with him. In these verses, Paul highlights how Jesus has changed his life. Instead of trying to be perfect all by himself, he now leans on Jesus and trusts in God’s grace. It’s not about being perfect; it’s about recognizing God’s love and grace, which Jesus showed us. In simple terms, Paul was emphasizing the main idea of the gospel that salvation is a gift from God for everyone, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. And he’s made it clear that we can’t earn salvation by our actions; it’s a result of God being kind and gracious, as sown through Jesus Christ’s ultimate sacrifice on the cross.

In the following passage, 3:1-14, Apostle Paul emphasizes the gospel's essential truth, employing diverse approaches. ***First, Paul challenges Galatians, urging them to rely on the Holy Spirit through faith (1-5).*** “You foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? Before your very eyes, Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. I would like to learn just one thing from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by believing what you heard? Are you so foolish? After beginning by means of the Spirit, are you now trying to finish by means of the flesh? Have you experienced so much in vain – if it really was in vain? So again, I ask, does God give you his Spirit and work miracles among you by the works of the law, or by your believing what you hear?” (1-5) Paul encourages the Galatians to recognize the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, emphasizing that this comes through simple faith, not by strictly following the law.

***Second, Paul illustrates the importance of faith using Abraham’s example (6-9).*** “So also, Abraham ‘believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’ Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: ‘All nations will be blessed through you.’ So those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.” (6-9) These verses highlight Abraham’s faith as an example, emphasizing that righteousness is attained through faith, not strict adherence to the law.

***Third, Paul reveals the limitations of the law and the blessing through faith (10-14).*** “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written the Book of the Law.’ Clearly, no one who relies on the law is justified before God because ‘the righteous will live by faith.’ The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, ‘The person who does these things will live by them.’ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: ‘Cursed is everyone who is hung on the pole.’ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.” (10-14) Paul describes the limitations of seeking justification through the law, highlighting that such efforts lead to a curse. On the contrary, faith in Christ brings the blessings promised to Abraham.

Let me close my sermon today by reflecting on the essence of Paul’s defense of the gospel. It may sound like a recurring theme, but the profound truth is this: “***Justification and salvation are through faith in Christ, not by works of the law.”*** Though it may seem repetitive, this gospel truth has profound implications for our daily walk with Christ.

In Galatians 2:20, Paul provides insight into what it truly means to live by faith: He said, “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.” Paul personally understood the depth of God’s love, recognizing that God loved him not because of his righteousness but despite his flaws and imperfections. This awareness of God’s love energized Paul’s unwavering commitment to the gospel of faith in Christ Jesus.

As Paul illustrates, living by faith is a transformative surrender – a daily acknowledgment that our old selves, with all their attempts for perfection, were crucified with Christ. Now, Christ lives in us, guiding and shaping our thoughts, actions, and decisions. It’s not just a theological concept but a reality that influences every aspect of our lives.

We can also learn from Peter’s mistakes. His temporary lapse into fear led to a compromise of the gospel truth and the potential loss of freedom. It serves as a poignant reminder to be vigilant about the subtle fears that can creep into our lives. Just as Peter faced the fear of being perceived as unorthodox or deviating from tradition, we, too, encounter fears that threaten to compromise our freedom in Christ. It's crucial to be aware of these fears to safeguard our freedom. By acknowledging them, we can bring them into the light of God’s truth and grace. We must remember that our acceptance before God is not based on societal norms or the opinion of others but solely on the grace offered through faith in Christ Jesus.

Above all, living by faith in Christ is an ongoing journey of trusting Jesus, finding peace in his love, and allowing his grace to shape our daily lives. It involves recognizing that God loves us just as we are and allowing that love and grace to bring about transformation from within. Like Paul, may we live lives deeply rooted in faith, embracing the transformative power of God’s love and radiating that love to those around us. May the Holy Spirit empower us to walk in freedom, unshackled by the chains of fear, and may our lives radiate the liberating truth of the gospel. Let’s read our key verse, 2:20, “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.”