

October 15, 2023

"Works and Faith"
Lesson 2

Galatians 2:11-21

Intro

Most of Paul's letters are addressed to a particular church, like 1/2 Corinthians and Ephesians. This letter is addressed to the churches in Galatia, a Roman province in what is now Turkey. Paul and Barnabas had evangelized this area on their first missionary journey, seen in Acts 13 and 14. Some of the cities in this province include Antioch, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. The letter was intended to be circulated to all the churches in the area, to be read to each one.

The Council of Jerusalem which occurs in Acts 15 was pivotal for the church's teaching. There had been disputes and concerns about how Gentiles were to live their faith in light of the Jewish faith. The council's conclusion was that Gentile converts did not need to be circumcised, nor to follow the laws of the Jewish faith. They needed only to abstain from fornication, and from eating things sacrificed to idols. Yet Judaizers had come into the churches converts who said that all Gentiles needed to follow Jewish customs to be saved. Even though the Council had determined otherwise, the Judaizers continued. So the churches were confused. What were people to do to practice their faith as they should?

Read Galatians 2:11-21

1. vs. 11: The Antioch in this verse is a different, larger city in Syria, not the one in Galatia
 - It was from this Antioch that Paul and Barnabas set out on their missionary trips
 - It was where many believers settled, the first place followers were called "Christians"
 - When Cephas (Peter) came to Antioch, Paul challenged him (opposed him)
 - The reason for this challenge is what this passage is all about

2. vs. 12: Paul notes that Peter has demonstrated contradictory behaviors
 - He ate with Jews when the leaders of the faith weren't in Antioch
 - When James and others did arrive, Peter quit eating with non-Jews
 - Paul says he did this because he was "afraid" of offending those who were circumcised
 - Some of these were likely Judaizers
 - Peter's comments before the council in Acts 15 were in defense of Gentiles
 - He is acting hypocritically here in rejecting them to not offend Judaizers

 - There is no verse in the OT which prohibits a Jew from eating with a Gentile
 - The commands concern unclean foods, not unclean people
 - Not eating with non-Jewish people came from trying to avoid foods and practices of Gentiles which were counter to God's laws
 - As Gentiles came to faith in Christ, this long-standing practice creates questions
 - Do both Jews and Gentiles have equal access to salvation?

3. vs. 13: Paul notes that Peter wasn't the only one to act this way
 - "Other Jews" followed Peter's example, including Barnabas ("the son of encouragement")
 - Paul is likely not the only one to stand up to this hypocrisy, but it seems that way here

4. vs. 14: Two phrases in this verse are very significant

“not acting in line with the truth of the gospel”

Paul is calling Peter out because his actions aren't representing the gospel of Christ

Being Christlike means treating others the way Christ treats us

In Gal. 3:28, Paul says, “There is neither Jew nor Greek...for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

God makes no distinction between Jews and Gentiles who come to Him in faith

Obviously, none of His followers should make distinctions either

“in front of them all”

Paul confronts Peter in front of everyone, including any Judaizers in the gathering

This is an issue which must be addressed publicly, not behind closed doors.

5. vs. 15: Paul here notes a difference between two groups: Jews and sinful Gentiles

The Jewish teachings were morally superior to the life lived in the Greco-Roman world

The Gentile world accepted sexual promiscuity, drunkenness, and idolatry

Jewish teaching from God Himself forbid such practices

There were other Gentiles who were “God-fearing”

Though not converted, they lived by the moral teachings of Judaism

6. vs. 16: Paul tears down the difference he just set up in vs. 15

Judaism's weakness was its reliance on keeping the law faithfully

The problem is that no one keeps the law 100% of the time

Even if a person sins only once, or in one area, they are still guilty

(See James 2:10)

While keeping the law is a good thing, it is not what provides “justification”

Being justified means God doesn't give us the punishment deserved for our sin

Paul notes we are justified “by our faith in Christ”

This phrase (or variations of it) occurs three times in this verse

There aren't, and cannot be, two ways to salvation: one for Jews and one for Gentiles

There is only one way, and it is through faith in Christ, not in reliance on works

7. vs. 17: Paul's argument here can be restated like this:

“If keeping the law isn't a requirement for Gentile Christians, isn't that opening a door for all the sinful practices of the Gentile world? Isn't that saying that anything goes?”

Sinching is obvious not a good thing, not a thing that Christ promotes or encourages

The Judaizers are thinking that keeping the law prevents a lapse into immorality

Since the Gentile world accepts immoral actions as normal, don't hang with them

The Judaizers are right to be concerned about upright living

But if they think that following Jesus leads to sin, they are mistaken in their thinking

8. vs. 18: “Rebuild what was destroyed” refers to the Jewish law and sacrifice system
It was “destroyed” by Jesus when He died on the cross as the ultimate sacrifice
The veil to the Holy of Holies was ripped open, allowing access to all to God
The Judaizers are trying to “rebuild” the Jewish system on top of Jesus’ sacrifice
Paul says essentially, “If I do this “rebuild”, I am breaking the spirit of the law in requiring
Gentiles to keep this, which has been done away with.”
9. vs. 19: The law doesn’t lead to life; it leads to a knowledge of sinfulness and death
Paul develops this idea well in Romans 7
Following / obeying the law doesn’t save us
No one can keep the law perfectly 100% of the time
Therefore, all are guilty of breaking the law, the punishment for that is death
Jesus’ death on the cross and resurrection gives us life to “live for God”
Our focus is to be on serving Him, rather than on keeping the rules of the Law
We have life in Christ by following and serving Him
10. vs. 20: Paul says that he is “crucified with Christ”
This means more than just imitating Him, which is a good thing
To be crucified means to be conformed to His sufferings
This means that our old sinful self is dead, has been killed
We shouldn’t be trying to resurrect him, to “rebuild what was destroyed”
Paul extends this by saying that now “Christ lives in me”
Our new self is now controlled by Christ and our desire to live by His ways
Once we are at this point, the questions of the Judaizers seem trivial
The Christian life isn’t about following rules
It’s about an ongoing submission to the will of Christ, to serve Him
We are now controlled and motivated by the love of Christ
11. vs. 21: Paul finishes this section with a very significant statement
“If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”
There is only one of the other: following the law or Christ’s death on the cross
Following one makes the other one unnecessary
Either the Law saves you, or Christ’s blood saves you
It can’t be both

Application: Verse 21 is the key point of the passage, a summary of the previous 10 verses. We must continually realize that we are saved by grace, and not by any amount of good words or following the rules that we might do. Our true, eternal life is found in Christ alone. Our faith is lived out in surrender, trust, and obedience to the will of Jesus. This way of living our faith frees us from the false doctrine that some amount, any amount, of self-effort can lead to our salvation.

Prayer: Father God, help us to live consistently for You by surrendering our will to Yours. Let your gospel message of love be seen in and through us. In Jesus’ name, Amen.

