



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for November 9, 2008
Released on Thursday, November 6, 2008**

"Confronting Opposition"

Lesson Text: Galatians 2:11–21.

Devotional Reading: Romans 10:5–17.

Background Scripture: Galatians 2:1–3:29.

Place: from Syrian Antioch

Time: A.D. 48

SCRIPTURE LESSON TEXT:

Galatians 2:11–21

11But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

12For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

13And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

14But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

15We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

16Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

17But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

18For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

19For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

20I 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.

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

LESSON AIMS

Facts: to see how Paul rebuked Peter for partiality toward Judaizers (false teachers) and then built a strong case for justification by faith.

Principle: to be aware that the law led truth seekers to faith in Christ, the only source of salvation, and to newness of life in Him.

Application: to encourage believers to define and accept redemption and regeneration that is based upon God's grace and to avoid man-made legalism.

INTRODUCTION

Legalism and Exclusion

"My dress looks old-fashioned." "I'll appear silly in this outfit." "I'll look foolish if I have to pray in front of people." "I don't want anyone to see my bald spot." "I look fat in a bathing suit."

Isn't it amazing how much our awareness of the perception of others influences what we do? This is not all bad. I, for one, am glad that we are still taught that certain things "are not done in public." The bad side is that fear of embarrassment may keep us from doing the brave thing, the right thing. *Peer pressure* is a slippery concept, but we have all experienced it. As adults, we realize that peer pressure is not just something we felt in junior high school. Adults can be utterly captive to the expectations of others, whether helpful or harmful.

In the Christian community (the church), behavioral expectations can have many beneficial effects in teaching us to maintain a lifestyle pleasing to God. But sometimes expectations within the church can get off track and lead to damaging legalism and exclusionary practices. Today's lesson concerns the most famous example of this in the history of the church. It was an apostle vs. apostle conflict: Paul's public confrontation of Peter in Antioch.

LESSON BACKGROUND

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). These cities were the likely recipients of the book, which was intended to be circulated among them and read to all the churches.

Galatians very likely was written after the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, which occurred around AD 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 is careful to say that he did not need permission from anyone in Jerusalem to preach to the Gentiles, but he still wanted their sanction and tacit agreement not to oppose his message. He noted that they 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, however. Earlier, 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 not to require circumcision, this Judaizing had continued. It wreaked havoc in the churches. The churches were confused. Should their men be

circumcised? Was the Jewish law still in effect? Paul's exposition of this matter is the heart of the book of Galatians.

QUESTIONS

CONFRONTATION WITH PETER—Gal. 2:11–14

1. What was the primary issue facing the Galatian churches (Galatians 2)?

The churches of Galatia were located in central Asia Minor and were founded by Paul on his first missionary journey. Shortly after his departure from the area, false teachers known as Judaizers came to Galatia and tried to convince these new believers that they had to keep the law of Moses to be saved.

What these false teachers were doing was preaching another gospel. However, this was not just another version of the same gospel Paul had preached. It was a perversion of the true gospel—a different gospel—that led Paul to pronounce a divine curse on anyone preaching this distorted message.

It also seems likely that the false teachers were trying to convince the Galatians that Paul was not a genuine apostle. This led Paul to defend not just his call to apostleship but the very message he proclaimed as well (Gal. 1:11–12). The other apostles did not find any deficiencies whatsoever in the gospel Paul preached. Consequently, they affirmed both his ministry and this message (v. 9).

2. Why did Paul have to confront Peter in Antioch? (Galatians 2:11)

Peter came to Antioch, Syria. This is no small journey, being something of a 400-mile trip. It is often assumed that he comes to investigate the church in Antioch on behalf of the leaders in Jerusalem.

From Paul's perspective, Peter is *to be blamed*, meaning that Peter is in the wrong about something. He goes on to explain Peter's misdeed.

Sometimes a face-to-face confrontation is necessary, and this was such an occasion (cf. Matt. 18:15–17). Peter, of course, was an eminent apostle, but he was not above sin.

Even if the issue of "circumcision" (v. 12) was resolved at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), the Judaizing party is still alive and active. The key issue at stake here is fellowship as demonstrated by eating together.

From the Jewish perspective, there is a strong tradition to share meals with other Jews only. This tradition is based on the fear of becoming ritually unclean by associating with Gentiles (see Acts 10:28). From the Gentile perspective, this is unacceptable elitism. If they are truly equal brothers and sisters with the Jewish Christians, then eating together should not be a problem.

3. How was Peter acting hypocritically toward his Gentile brothers? (vs. 12,13)

Prior to the arrival of these Jewish brethren from Jerusalem, Peter ate with Gentiles. When those of the circumcision faction arrived, though, Peter stopped having any social contact with Gentile believers. Trying to please his Jewish brethren led him to ostracize his Gentile brothers.

It was bad enough that Peter was acting hypocritically, but his actions influenced others as well. Fellow Jews—even Barnabas, who had traveled with Paul on the Gentile mission—followed Peter's lead. Like many other sins, prejudice is more caught than taught.

While it may not have been clear to all present, it was certainly clear to Paul that Peter and those following his lead were not living "according to the truth of the gospel." The gospel is to be taken to the whole world (Matt. 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16) and is for all people. Separating ourselves from other believers on the

basis of race, nationality, culture, or other externals is a denial of what the gospel is all about (Gal. 3:26–29).

CONVERSION FROM SIN—Gal. 2:15–19

4. How did Paul confront Peter regarding the “truth of the gospel” (vs. 14,15)?

The *truth of the gospel* is that 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. This is why Paul can write a little later, “There is neither Jew nor Greek, ... ye are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).

It is easy to imagine that this is an intense, public confrontation (*before them all*). Paul understands that the churches he has started, which have many Gentile members, are on the verge of being disavowed. The Judaizers have twisted the situation to give this message to Gentiles: “OK, you don’t have to be circumcised, but we won’t eat with you unless you are. Thus you will always be excluded from true, full acceptance.”

We should understand that at this particular point in history there is no comparison between Peter and Paul when it comes to influence and reputation. Peter had walked and talked with the Lord. Peter is seen as the leading apostle. It is Peter who had faced down the Jewish authorities in the earliest days of the church. Two decades after the resurrection, Peter is a legendary leader.

Paul, on the other hand, is still “a bit of an unknown” in AD 51. His famous letters are yet to be written. He has the stain of having been a zealous persecutor of the church. He is from Tarsus, hardly the mainstream of Judaism. And he is associated with the Antioch church, seen by some in Jerusalem as out of control. It takes a lot of courage for Paul to confront Peter! While the exact nature of the controversy (Judaizing) is long gone today, the church still experiences a similar need for confrontation when important truth is at stake.

5. If the law could not save, why was it given to Israel (v. 16)?

Paul himself was painfully aware of the fact that obedience to the law did not bring assurance of salvation. To begin with, no one could perfectly keep the Mosaic law. If nothing else, the law reminded people that they were sinners in need of saving grace. Although one person may be less of a lawbreaker than another, breaking any law of God puts all of us in the same state: lost sinners (cf. Jas. 2:10).

In contrast to any attempt to gain acceptability with God through the Mosaic law, Paul declared that salvation is “by grace... through faith” (Eph. 2:8). As used by the Apostle Paul, “faith” is our total response to God’s grace. This includes “repentance from dead works” (Heb. 6:1) and the “obedience of faith” (Rom. 16:26).

6. What is the purpose of works in the life of the believer?

True faith will manifest itself in turning from sin and willingly doing whatever God asks us to do. In no sense do we earn salvation, though; it is the gift of God (Rom. 6:23). When we truly believe in Christ, good works will follow (Eph. 2:10; Titus 2:14)—not so that we can receive salvation but to reveal that we have salvation!

Three times in Galatians 2:16 Paul declared that no one can be “justified” (literally, “declared not guilty”) by keeping the Mosaic law. Paul wanted the Judaizers and those who were listening to them to hear very clearly what he was saying: Salvation is by faith, not by works!

7a. What does Paul mean by “is ...Christ the minister of sin” (v. 17)?

Paul now returns to the situation of Peter. If a Jewish Christian eats with a Gentile, he or she is "sinning" according to the Jewish law. If *Christ* and Paul promote this fellowship, are they promoting sin? Is then Christ a *minister of sin*, one who serves sin?

As he frequently does, Paul uses a technique of reducing the argument to the absurd. Is Christ, who gave His life as a sin offering (Hebrews 9:28), now an advocate for sin? *God forbid*. Of course not! Neither Peter nor Paul is sinning by eating with the Gentile believers.

7b. What did the law teach Paul (vs. 18, 19)?

The law has taught Paul many things, including the nature of sin itself (Romans 7:7). The law is not sin, but it defines sin. Furthermore, Paul's experience with the law has 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.

For Paul, then, the great sin is not in following the law, but in believing and teaching that it is a necessary part of being a Christian believer. If Paul were to fall into this trap, he would be making himself to be a *transgressor*. This word has the sense of a "nonkeeper" of the law. Ironically, then, Paul concludes that he will be violating the spirit of the law if he requires Gentiles to keep it.

CONSECRATION TO CHRIST—Gal. 2:20—21

8a. How are we too like Paul, crucified with Christ (v. 20a)?

We are *crucified with Christ* so that we will be freed from the enslavement of sin (Romans 6:6). This understanding applies to Jews and Gentiles alike. The old self is controlled by lust, by sinful passions (Ephesians 4:22). The new life is controlled by *Christ*, for He lives in us. By uniting with Christ through faith, we have a renewal that leads to becoming the man or woman God created us to be, a person in God's image (see Colossians 3:10).

A beautiful example of this is found in the practice of baptism: a believer is immersed in water, thus reenacting the death of Christ. Being lifted out of the water is seen as a type of resurrection, being raised to a new life (Romans 6:4; Colossians 2:12).

8b. How was Paul now motivated to live (v. 20b)?

Christ is Paul's master and Lord. Paul lives for Christ, but Christ does not control him by threats or legalistic rules. Paul is controlled and motivated by the love of Christ as demonstrated on the cross.

There is nothing more important to Paul than God's demonstration of love through Christ's death. This is why Paul can characterize his preaching as "Christ crucified" (1 Corinthians 1:23), which Paul acknowledges to be a "stumblingblock" (offense) to the Jews. It couldn't be that simple, could it? What about all these rules you need to keep? Is it really possible that we can have decent behavior and true, rich fellowship on the basis of our mutual love and faith in Christ? For Paul, the answer is yes.

9. How does seeking salvation by works frustrate the grace of God (v. 21)?

When Paul said, "I do not frustrate the grace of God" (Gal. 2:21), he meant that he would do nothing to keep God's grace from producing the effects for which it was designed. To give in to the Judaizers would be to declare that salvation was the result of human effort instead of divine grace. Trying to be justified by the law would frustrate God's grace. If we could save ourselves, or merit redemption by good works, we would need no Saviour. In short, Christ would have died in vain if we could earn our way into God's favor as the Judaizers taught.

10. How could Christ be “dead in vain?”

Paul concludes with a final zinger: If we go the path of legalism, believing rules-keeping makes one righteous, then we have destroyed the gospel by nullifying the death of Christ. We are saying, “Jesus, You didn’t really need to die for me. I’ll just clean up my act and justify myself. Self-righteousness is the better way.” If self-justification were possible in God’s eyes, the entire mission of Jesus to be the sacrificial Lamb of God (John 1:29) was unnecessary. May we never come to the point of despising the death of Christ in this way!

CONCLUSION

Extremes

Ironically, libertines (rule scoffers) and legalists share a common trait: both desire to be in control. Libertines want to be in control of their own lives without any restrictions or rules. Legalists want to extend their control over others and have everyone behave according to their expectations. Both would be advised to let God be in control, because of course He is. Our puny attempts to retain control are really acts of defiance against God.

As we let God be in control, we realize that there are three primary factors at work to bring us into conformity with God’s standards. First is the Word of God. The Bible is full of advice, examples, and demands for how we should live. We should live lives of holiness (2 Corinthians 7:1; 1 Peter 1:15, 16).

Second, we should follow the examples of mature, proven Christian leaders (1 Corinthians 11:1). There is no quicker way to disilluminate a new believer than for him or her to discover hypocrisy among the church’s leaders. (This is a topic of next week’s lesson.)

Third, we should allow the Holy Spirit to work in our lives to transform and renew us (Titus 3:5). Our constant plea should not be “behave to get right and stay right with God” but “love and obey God because you already are right with Him.” If we are truly sold out to Him, our lives will be filled with spiritual fruit.

PRACTICAL POINTS

1. Fearing people more than fearing God always leads to compromise (Gal. 2:11–12).
2. We are all accountable for the example we set (v. 13).
3. Christian love requires us to rebuke one another when such rebuke is needed (v. 14).
4. We must be careful to avoid any hint that justification comes because of human works (vs. 15–16).
5. It is dishonoring to God and His work to try to make ourselves acceptable to Him through our good works (vs. 17–19).
6. We cannot truly live in Christ while clinging to the law, which condemns us (vs. 20–21).

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

Focus on Christ, not on the expectations of others.

PRAYER

Holy Father, guard us from a spirit of pride when our behavior meets Your desires, from a spirit of discouragement when we fail You, and from a spirit of judgment when we disagree with the actions of others. Help us to love You more dearly, every day. We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus, amen.

ANTICIPATING NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Come up with synonyms for "conversation" in Philippians 3:20, using various sources such as Bible dictionaries, translations, commentaries, and word-study books. Do the same with "moderation" in 4:5 and with "careful" in verse 6, as well as with the series of qualities listed in verse 8.

November 16th's lesson is titled, "Mutual Support." The lesson text is Philippians 3:17—4:9. Study Philippians 3:3—4:9 in preparation for this lesson. *Good studying!*

LESSON SUMMARIZED BY

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