

The Effective Nature of the Gospel

Lesson Scope: [Galatians 2](#)

Lesson Focus

In chapter 1, Paul boldly declared that Jesus Christ had revealed the Gospel directly to him (verse 12). In chapter 2, Paul emphasized that he received the full support and acceptance of the apostles at Jerusalem. The "right hand of fellowship" illustrated the unity of the church. The ministry and message of the church to both Jews and Gentiles was one work.

In chapter 1, Paul gave his personal testimony of his conversion. He continued his testimony in chapter 2 by explaining the power of Christ in his life. In Galatians 2:16-21, Paul proclaimed that Christ provided justification before God, which the Law could not do. In addition, the power of the resurrected Christ indwelling him made him a dynamic witness for God.

Paul preached from the burden of a heart that personally knew the power of the Gospel. He knew that the Gospel could meet the heart cry of both Jews and Gentiles. Paul believed what Peter openly declared at the Jerusalem Conference. "But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as [the Gentiles]."

The New Testament Gospel fulfills what the Old Testament Law foreshadowed. The believer is "justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law."

The Gospel is effective only when it is given consistently. This was the burden of Paul in this passage. To require circumcision as an essential for salvation was inconsistent with God's revelation to Peter and to Paul. Further, our actions must agree with the truth taught. Finally, the life of Christ in us produces genuine Christ-likeness.

Frequently, Christian professors have many commendable character traits yet lapse into carnality as the occasion comes. This is not consistent Christianity. The life of Christ in us is an enlightening, defining power over sin.

Lesson Aim: To show that the Gospel is fully able to meet man's spiritual needs.

Theme Verses: [Romans 1:16-17](#). For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

Lesson Text

Communicating the Gospel

[Galatians 2:1-2](#) ¹ Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also. ² And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

Defending the Gospel

[Galatians 2:3-14](#) ³ But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: ⁴ And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: ⁵ To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. ⁶ But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed *to be somewhat* in conference added nothing to me: ⁷ But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision *was* unto Peter; ⁸ (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) ⁹ And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. ¹⁰ Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. ¹¹ But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. ¹² For 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. ¹³ And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation. ¹⁴ But 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?

Living the Gospel

Galatians 2:15-21 ¹⁵ We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, ¹⁶ Knowing 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. ¹⁷ But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. ¹⁸ For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. ¹⁹ For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. ²⁰ 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. ²¹ I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Questions for Study

Communicating the Gospel

1. What are some requirements for effective communication among brethren?
2. Why is unity essential as we communicate the Gospel to the world?

Defending the Gospel

3. Why would making circumcision a requirement for salvation destroy the truth of the Gospel?
4. What brought unity between the apostles to the Jews and the apostles to the Gentiles?
5. Why were Peter's actions wrong?

6. How might we live inconsistently with what we profess?

Living the Gospel

7. What does faith in Christ do for us that Law could not do?

8. What is required to live with Christ?

9. How does the life of Christ in us express itself in our daily life?

Analyzing the Passage

The "false brethren" (Galatians 2:4) wanted to keep some of the Law, primarily circumcision, in addition to faith in Christ. Paul condemned this as a compromise to avoid persecution (Galatians 6:12). The writings of both Paul and James show the folly of keeping only part of the Law. "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all" (James 2:10).

Dissimulation (Galatians 2:13) is pretending to act from one motive when another motive is actually inspiring the act. Peter and those who followed him pretended loyalty to the Law, when actually they feared the brethren who came from James.

"After the manner of Gentiles" (Galatians 2:14) shows that Peter himself did not practice the Law. God had also showed Peter that Cornelius was saved without circumcision. Peter failed to live his knowledge.

Galatians 2:17-18 show the confusion of mixing the two Testaments. If the Law were still in effect, then living apart from the Law would be sin, and Christ, the author of the Gospel, would be a minister of sin. If Peter, who once spoke for justification by faith, turned again and spoke for the Law, he would be guilty of inconsistency.

"I through the law am dead to the law" (Galatians 2:19). The Law works death by activating the conscience and bringing accountability for transgression. The only escape from this death is death—to crucify our old nature by the power of Christ. This leaves us dead to sin and the Law so that we are free to live with Christ. See Romans 7:1-6.

This new life in Christ is not mystical, but actually lived in everyday experience—"the life which I now live in the flesh" (Galatians 2:20).

The new life is inspired and empowered by the example of Christ's sacrificial love, "who loved me, and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

Principles and Applications

Communicating the Gospel

1. Effective communication in the church enhances the progress of the Gospel (Galatians 2:1-2). Truth is the cornerstone of communication. Honest-hearted men discuss with open minds the implications of divine truth. Devotion to truth frees men from prejudice and a party spirit, allowing the Spirit of God to move unrestricted among them. Only those with a total and unwavering commitment to divine truth will be able to receive truth and communicate it to others.

2. The Gospel provides salvation apart from the Law (Galatians 2:3-5). God gave the Law for man's well-being (Deuteronomy 5:33). The Law taught men to serve God willingly out of committed love (Deuteronomy 10:12, 20; 11:1, 22). The Law prescribed a spiritual circumcision (Deuteronomy 10:16). God intended the Law to prepare men for the fuller and richer spiritual dimension of the Gospel.

Men fell short in keeping the Law because they had a sinful nature. Their natural minds did not comprehend its spiritual meaning. Peter described the Law as a yoke that no one could bear (Acts 15:10). The Gospel delivers men from the domination of the old nature and imparts power to live above the Law.

Defending the Gospel

3. The Gospel provides for spiritual liberty in Christ (Galatians 2:4-5). The Christian is "under the law to Christ," but the Christian life is not merely a matter of staying away from an array of prohibitions. The work of the Holy Spirit in the life of one who identifies with Christ frees him to express Christian virtue and to find joy in doing God's will. The false liberty that many proclaim is not spiritual, is not liberty, and is not in Christ.

4. The Gospel finds its source and authority in Christ, not in man (Galatians 2:6). We have His divine revelation. God used men of different cultures, backgrounds, and personalities to give His message; yet it is one message because it is His message, not theirs.

5. The Gospel offers universal hope and deliverance from sin (Galatians 2:7-9). The Gospel requirements can be met by all people in all places. All people of any culture, religious training, or social standing have the same heart cry, and all have the same sin issue. We are constrained by Christ's love to take the Gospel to all men because we know it can fill

the emptiness in their hearts.

6. The Gospel unites believers in bonds of love and unity (Galatians 2:9). The grace of God opens the truth of the Scriptures to all those who seek for it with all their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Men unknown to each other have found the same experience with God and very similar expressions of truth in their daily lives.

Unity is based on agreement concerning sound Biblical principles and doctrines. Love is not the basis for unity; it is a preserver of unity. "Love is of God" (1 John 4:7), and it marks the family of God.

7. The truth of the Gospel exposes errors and hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-14). By nature, the Gospel is illuminating. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). In contrast, human nature is given to pretense and hidden motives. "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19). If professing Christians live falsely, men lose confidence in the truth of the Gospel.

Are we consistent? Are we truly a brotherhood like we present ourselves to the world? Or do men join us only to find party spirits, power struggles, unacceptance of others, or partiality? We portray ourselves as Bible-practicing Christians. Do we actually practice what the Bible teaches about wealth, humility, and service?

Living the Gospel

8. The Gospel brings justification through faith in Christ (Galatians 2:16). Justification is the supreme proof that the Gospel is effective. There is no other way to bring peace and rest to the conscience—to meet a holy God in peace. "For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?" (Hebrews 9:13-14).

The shed blood of Jesus Christ satisfies divine justice. That blood is the only sufficient ransom from the slavery of sin. Faith responds to God's promise, and God Himself justifies us. "That [God] might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

9. The power of the Gospel gives spiritual life (Galatians 2:19-21). Through Adam, death reigned over all men. Through the Law, the reign

of sin and death was strengthened. See Romans 7. But "in [Christ] was life; and the life was the light of men" (John 1:4).

The death of Christ provided for our justification before God and our reconciliation with God. But salvation is more than a pardon from a dying Saviour. Salvation is deliverance from sin by a living, omnipotent Lord. "For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Romans 5:10).

Important Teachings

1. Effective communication in the church enhances the progress of the Gospel (Galatians 2:1-2).
2. The Gospel provides salvation apart from the Law (Galatians 2:3-5).
3. The Gospel provides for spiritual liberty in Christ (Galatians 2:4-5).
4. The Gospel finds its source and authority in Christ, not in man (Galatians 2:6).
5. The Gospel offers universal hope and deliverance from sin (Galatians 2:7-9).
6. The Gospel unites believers in bonds of love and unity (Galatians 2:9).
7. The truth of the Gospel exposes errors and hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-14).
8. The Gospel brings justification through faith in Christ (Galatians 2:16).
9. The power of the Gospel gives spiritual life (Galatians 2:19-21).

Answers to Questions

1. What are some requirements for effective communication among brethren?
Openness and honesty are essential for good communication. A total commitment to practice divine truth is essential as brethren discuss the meaning of the Word together. Discernment of truth is impossible among the uncommitted.
2. Why is unity essential as we communicate the Gospel to the world?
Unless the church all speak the same things, those who were once attracted to the church will turn away. See Philippians 2:14-16.
3. Why would making circumcision a requirement for salvation destroy

the truth of the Gospel?

This would have mixed the two covenants. The Law was fulfilled and passed away in Christ. Requiring circumcision would have destroyed the liberty of the Gospel from the Law. Men would never have experienced the full deliverance from sin, which the Gospel provided. Christianity would have remained a sect of Judaism rather than becoming the hope and joy of believers of all nations.

4. What brought unity between the apostles to the Jews and the apostles to the Gentiles?

They perceived the grace of God moving among them all, bringing a message that powerfully delivered both Jews and Gentiles from sin and death.

5. Why were Peter's actions wrong?

Peter did not live up to his knowledge. God had revealed to Peter the acceptance of the Gentiles by faith at Cornelius's house. When Peter came to Antioch, he ate with Gentiles (as he had with Cornelius) until other brethren came from James who were still intent on keeping the Law. Because he feared what men would say, he suddenly appeared to be a zealous Law keeper. His apparent loyalty to the Law was not loyalty to the Law but a fear of men. Paul rightly called it pretense.

6. How might we live inconsistently with what we profess?

We might drive black vehicles on Sunday, but have decorated or status vehicles for work. We could claim to believe in good stewardship, but buy expensive toys for our children. We might give verbal support to missions that take the Gospel to the poor, yet go on luxurious, pleasure-seeking vacations. We might claim to be Bible-practicing Christians, yet ignore Bible teaching against materialism and covetousness. We might extol our martyred ancestors, yet fail to live as pilgrims and strangers ourselves.

7. What does faith in Christ do for us that the Law could not do?

Faith in Christ gives us justification before God. In contrast, "by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified." Faith in Christ gives rest to the conscience, which the Law could not give. See Hebrews 9:13, 14. Faith in Christ gives liberty in contrast to the Law, which Peter described as a yoke no one could bear. Faith in Christ delivers us from the power of sin and death. In contrast, the Law only revealed sin and confirmed the sentence of death.

8. What is required to live with Christ?

To live with Christ, we must die with Him. Christ left us an example: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:5-8). We also must humble ourselves to crucify our proud nature and live with Christ.

9. How does the life of Christ in us express itself in our daily life?

The life of Christ expresses itself in a conscience free from guilt, a mind centered on spiritual truth, a heart and will filled with inspiration and zeal for the Lord's work, and a whole body, soul, and spirit committed to the Lord's cause in the world. The sin-sick will be told the Gospel, the needy be ministered to, the broken-hearted listened to, and the sick and prisoners visited. Excuses will not be made for carnal inconsistencies; instead, we will willingly say we are sorry for any wrong we have done.

Summarizing the Lesson

"And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) and hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: that in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus" (Ephesians 2:1-7).

Research Guide

1. Study God's revelation to Peter in Acts 10 and 11:1-18.
2. Study Paul's parallel teaching in Romans 3:20-8:39.