

The Efficacy of the Gospel

Lesson Scope: [Galatians 2](#)

References in brackets relate to Lesson Scope unless noted otherwise

Lesson Focus

Paul continues the overview of his life. Doubtless he found this awkward and painful to relate but necessary to refute the message of the Judaizers. Even though his account is autobiographical, his point was not to promote self, but rather to illustrate the power and grace of God at work in a person's life.

The story of his life illustrates that God can convert even a waster and persecutor into full harmony with those he once persecuted—without having talked to them! Such a reconciliation to God Himself and to His people is what God desires for Jew and Gentile alike.

The fact that Paul had received the Gospel by divine revelation confirms its validity. Although he had received the Gospel independently from the other apostles, his message was identical. Such unity of message is impossible for humans to replicate and forms a powerful inducement to receive both the message and the messenger.

Never was a message more worthy of acceptance than the message borne by the apostle Paul: that Jews and Gentiles could be restored to communion with God, live in victory over sin, and live in harmony with their fellow men.

The narrative history of chapters 1 and 2 provides the backdrop for the climax of Paul's argument in chapter 3. Paul states several propositions that all recipients of the Gospel should understand.

1. The Gospel is from Jesus Christ who gave Himself for our deliverance (1:4).
2. The Gospel is of divine origin and communicated to mankind through revelation (1: 11-12).
3. The Gospel is singular; no alternatives may be contemplated, for no variations exist (1:7, 9).
4. Life comes only through faith in Christ, not in performing works of the Law (2:16, 20-21).

Make the lesson practical by discussing issues in which we need to identify inconsistency and stand for the truth. Emphasize the importance of remaining open to the brotherhood. Help people to understand the value and purpose of church regulations, while making it clear that mere conformity to a code of conduct has no saving power.

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

Lesson Aim: To show that the Gospel alone provides salvation for Jew and Gentile.

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 (KJV) 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 (KJV) 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 (KJV) 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 can be learned from Paul's methods in communicating the Gospel?
2. What is the significance of Titus remaining uncircumcised?
3. What was at stake in this contest over the rite of circumcision?

Defending the Gospel

4. Discuss the unity of divine revelation (2:9-10).
5. Discuss the incident at Antioch. Why were Peter's actions wrong? Why was Paul's intervention effective?

Living the Gospel

6. What does justification by faith in Christ produce?
7. How can we avoid frustrating the grace of God?

Analysing the Passage

The persistence of the Judaizers surfaces repeatedly in the New Testament, and their various motives are enumerated in Galatians. On superficial consideration, perhaps we struggle to relate to these motives of "false brethren unawares brought in." However, the Gentile Galatians found the message of the Judaizers appealing. Several explanations might apply. The spiritually awakened heart yearns to move higher; perhaps the Galatians thought that the rite of circumcision would bring spiritual growth and advancement.

Whatever the motivation, the Galatians desired to practice the Law and circumcision in particular. The Judaizers urgently imposed it on the Gentile converts at the cost of harassment and persecution (6:12). The temptation to accommodation and compromise must have been strong. Yet Paul and the apostles at Jerusalem would have none of it (2:5).

Those who kept the Law found that they needed to believe in Jesus for Salvation, keeping the Law did not justify them (2: 16-17). Now if those who have received justification through faith in Christ feel themselves sinners unless they keep the Law, they make Jesus, the author of the Gospel, the minister of sin (2:17).

Frustrate (2:21) means to set aside, to disesteem, neutralize, or violate.

Principles and Applications

Communicating the Gospel

1. The consistent and universal message of the Gospel transcends human communication (2:1 -2, 6). Paul's early ministry occurred outside the context of the Jerusalem church. His conferring with the church and leaders there began with a divine command, rather than human initiative. That unity can arise from such circumstances is indisputable proof that the seeker can find truth and that those who bring a perverted gospel are accursed.

Defending the Gospel

2. The Gospel rebukes human prejudices, and places all in fields of service (2:3, 6, 9). The Good News unites Jew and Gentile into the family of God. Every member of this divine family is equally approved by God, who uses each according to His will. God is not a respecter of human qualifications, for He gave and developed them all. He could and did powerfully work through the Jerusalem apostles. It was no problem for Him to bring to their numbers their former persecutor. The dynamics of such a situation illustrate the mercy and transforming power of God.

3. The purity of the Gospel must be maintained (2:11 -14). The devil clearly understands the power of God and relentlessly works to undermine it. Any means that might distract our focus on the Gospel is one that he will use. Mixing error and truth, provoking envy, inflaming prejudices, and exploiting human failure are all tactics our archenemy ruthlessly arrays against the Gospel. The popular wisdom of our day advocates that good can be found in everyone, and that conflict should be avoided. Where the purity and fullness of the Gospel are at stake, such thought processes are erroneous.

4. The Gospel enlightens man's thinking and behaviour (2:11-14). Nobody is past the possibility of failure—even a prominent apostle. Pervasive confusion is a result of public failure. Yet the Gospel is capable of clarifying any situation and fully restoring it. Such a process will involve confrontation, confession, and teaching, medicine from which we naturally recoil. However, the healing effects are so beneficial that we should always receive it willingly.

In spite of the happy ending to this account, we should be sobered at the thought of our influence. As children of God who have been enlightened by the Gospel, we should consider the consequences of incon-

sistency. The gap such failures create must often be bridged by others, a supreme test of their own faithfulness.

Living the Gospel

5. The grace of God is based in the faith of Jesus Christ and not in the Law (2:16). The Law reveals the destructive consequences of sin and the gap it introduces between sinful man and a holy God. Outside of the Law, it would be impossible for sinful man to perceive or comprehend the desperateness of his condition. No works of righteousness performed by sinful man can accomplish restoration with God.

God alone can justify us, and He does this in response to our faith. It is God's work by which our load of guilt and condemnation is removed and our conscience is cleared. "That [God] might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Romans 3:26).

6. The grace of God enables and requires holy living (2:17-21). The preceding verses conclusively establish the futility of relying on the Law to restore us to righteousness before God. It is equally incongruous that a recipient of the grace of God should return to the sinful conduct of his past life. Is Christ a minister of sin? God forbid! And yet the temptation remains today to think that the grace of God allows us to defy the righteousness of God.

7. Death to self and newness of life in Christ is the very essence of the Gospel (2:19-21). Our lives should be a daily testimony to the transforming power of the Gospel. Christ indwells our hearts and radiates His presence through our lives. May we never "frustrate the grace of God," but rather display it in our attitudes, appearance, and actions.

Important Teachings

1. The consistent and universal message of the Gospel transcends human communication (2:1-2, 6).

2. The Gospel rebukes human prejudices, and places all in fields of service (2:3, 6, 9).

3. The purity of the Gospel must be maintained (2:11-14).

4. The Gospel enlightens man's thinking and behaviour (2:11-14).

5. The grace of God is based in the faith of Jesus Christ and not in the Law (2:16).

6. The grace of God enables and requires holy living (2:17-21).

7. Death to self and newness of life in Christ is the very essence of the Gospel (2:19-21).

Answers to Questions

1. What can be learned from Paul's methods in communicating the Gospel?

Paul considered the feelings of his audience. By communicating both privately and publicly, he gave space for people to think through the message he was bearing. When comparing with verses such as 1 Corinthians 9:19-22, we can be reasonably sure that he followed this approach both in sharing with his peers and with the unsaved. Even though he was an apostle, he was willing to give an account of his ministry to his fellow apostles.

2. What is the significance of Titus remaining uncircumcised?

On doctrinal issues, he bore the pressure and heat from unpopular stands and did not require subordinates to make compromises for the sake of quiet. Compromise and blending of viewpoints are sinful when such processes produce a heretical conclusion.

3. What was at stake in this contest over the rite of circumcision?

Nothing less than the efficacy of the Gospel. Was the work of Christ adequate or not? The conclusion of Paul's argument will only come in chapter 6, where he turns to Christian fruitfulness, but it is worth remembering here that if our attention is diverted from faith in God to reliance on religious ceremonies, we will never attain the spiritual vitality and usefulness that God intends.

4. Discuss the unity of divine revelation (2:9-10).

Paul's development and maturing into a minister and apostle did not follow that of the other apostles; he never knew Jesus as a human friend. After his dramatic conversion on the Damascus road, he understandably could not return to Jerusalem, so his awakening and early growth in the Christian faith was not at the feet of the senior apostles.

It seems to have been held against him then, and to some extent it startles us now. Yet when Paul and the senior apostles conferred, their unity was complete. What a clear proof of the divine origin of their unity!

God reveals His will to seekers, even to men like Paul who were once His avowed enemies. God can use anyone—mightily and effectively—who allows himself to be an instrument in His hands.

5. Discuss the incident at Antioch. Why were Peter's actions wrong? Why was Paul's intervention effective?

Peter was holding the Gentiles to a standard that he himself no longer followed. His conduct changed markedly when others from Jerusalem came. While there is a place for modifying our conduct to get along with others, this should never involve outright sin or deceit.

Furthermore, we need to consider our influence. Peter's prominent position among the apostles, and especially his work in bringing in the family of Cornelius meant that his conduct on the matters of racial relations between Jew and Gentile had enormous significance.

Paul's intervention was effective, first of all, because it was true. Truth is powerful and will uphold those who stand on it. His intervention was successful also because it was both prompt and as public as Peter's failure. Likely persons involved witnessed the examples of both men. There are situations when giving a matter time is harmful.

6. What does justification by faith in Christ produce?

Justification produces a person who is spiritually dead to sin, and renounces fully all its pernicious effects. Yet he remains bodily alive and spiritually awakened and empowered by the Son of God. Such a person is in complete harmony with God and experiences physical life and spiritual vitality in the fullest measure that God intends for humanity.

7. How can we avoid frustrating the grace of God?

Any distraction from the grace of God frustrates its effectiveness. The grace of God is complete, free, and efficacious, so much so that for millennia mankind was not capable of comprehending it. A schoolmaster was required. In verse 17, Paul mentions in passing what is the more besetting temptation of our time. It is to claim that the grace of God permits sinful living. Rather, the grace of God enables us to live in harmony with the government of God.

Summarizing the Lesson

Rather than being a step to a deeper understanding, spiritual growth, or a closer relationship to God, concentration on the ritual works of the Law was a fatal distraction. The Law could only reveal spiritual death; it was powerless to bring spiritual life. The performance of the Law involved the works and actions of the body, rather than the exercise of faith, which is the realm of the spirit.

The backdrop of this chapter includes racial prejudice between Jew and Gentile, the human tendency to replace the authentic with legalism, and human failure resulting from sensitivity to peer pressure. This is all recorded by the author who was attempting to resolve an alienation from his spiritual flock. The chapter was urgently relevant then and remains so now. May we be thankful that the grace of God and the message of the Gospel are timeless and that hope and deliverance are available today!

Research Guide

1. Study the lives of the six characters mentioned in this lesson: Paul, Barnabas, Titus, James, Peter, and John.
2. Study the parallel passage in Acts 15.
3. Read the chapter titled “Justification” in *Doctrines of the Bible*.