

UNIT 2: LETTER TO THE GALATIANS

Lesson 5

July 5, 2026

Defending the Gospel:

The Gospel must be defended against all threats.

THE LESSON OVERVIEW

In the second chapter of the Letter to the Galatians, Paul provided a brief account of the early stages of his ministry. He highlights his divine calling to proclaim the Gospel to the Gentiles, a mission recognized and affirmed by the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem. Paul also addressed an issue involving Simon Peter, who had been influenced by Judaizers in Galatia. Furthermore, Paul reflects on his transformation, stating that his prior reliance on adherence to the Law had ended because he had been “crucified with Christ” (v. 20). Through this spiritual rebirth, Paul said he now lived by faith in Jesus, who dwelled within him.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Galatians 2 can be divided into two parts: Paul’s account of his meeting with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem (vv. 1-10) and his confrontation with Peter in Antioch (vv. 11-21). In the first section, Paul reveals that the Gospel he preached to the Gentiles aligned with the message of the Jerusalem church leaders. The second section shifts to Paul’s confrontation with Peter, whose inconsistent behavior regarding eating with Gentiles believers threatened to compromise the Gospel’s message. Through these two accounts, Paul emphasized the need to maintain the Gospel’s integrity and transformative power for all believers – Jews and Gentiles.

THE LESSON OUTLINE

1. THE GOSPEL PRESENTED TO LEADERS: Galatians 2:1-10.

- A. Paul is Faithful to the Gospel, (1-5)
- B. Paul Called to the Gentiles, (6-10)

2. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE DISREGARDED: Galatians 2:11-14.

- A. Paul Confronted Peter for Compromise, (11-13)
- B. Paul Rejects Requirements of Judaism, (14)

3. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE DEFENDED: Galatians 2:15-21.

- A. Believers Are Not Justified by Works, (15-17)
- B. God’s Grace Is Enough, (18-21)

DISCUSSING THE LESSON

1. THE GOSPEL PRESENTED TO LEADERS: Galatians 2:1-10.

A. Paul Is Faithful to the Gospel, Galatians 2:1-5.

Paul informs the Galatian Christians of a journey to Jerusalem that took place “after fourteen years” (v. 1 NKJV), likely referring to fourteen years after his conversion. Accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, Paul went to Jerusalem in response to a revelation (v. 2). This visit was not a casual trip, but a strategic meeting between Paul and the church leaders to ensure that the Gospel he was preaching among the Gentiles was not in vain. As such, his decision to bring Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile follower of Jesus Christ, was intentional. Titus was a living example of the transforming power of faith in Christ without adherence to Jewish customs. By presenting Titus to the church leaders in Jerusalem, Paul illustrated that salvation is by grace through faith alone, not through any works of the Law.

In verses 3-5, Paul notes the opposition he faced from “false brethren” (v. 4) who had infiltrated the church. These individuals, knowing Titus was a Gentile, sought to impose the rite of circumcision on him and by extension, on all Gentile believers. Paul describes their motives as an attempt to “spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage” (v. 4). This language reveals the significance of this issue. For Paul, adding any requirement to faith in Christ amounted to undermining the Gospel itself and enslaving believers under a yoke of legalism. Therefore, Paul’s response was firm: “We did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you” (v. 5). This statement shows his unwavering commitment to safeguarding the integrity of the Gospel message. Paul understood that compromising on this issue would not only affect his ministry, but also jeopardize the spiritual freedom of all believers.

B. Paul Called to the Gentiles, Galatians 2:6-10.

Paul writes of his meeting with the leaders in Jerusalem, “who seemed to be pillars” (v. 9) of the church, such as James, Peter (Cephas), and John. He was not disparaging them but acknowledging that many held these men in high regard as leaders responsible for safeguarding the Gospel. Paul said that he met with them, but insisted these leaders added nothing to his message. Instead, they affirmed that his ministry to the Gentiles was divinely commissioned and complete. He said, “they gave to be and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship” (v. 9), meaning they sent Paul and his team out with their blessings.

Paul emphasized that “God accepteth no man’s person” (v. 6), meaning that the Lord shows no favoritism. This is a powerful reminder that spiritual authority is grounded in divine calling rather than human status. The agreement between Paul and the Jerusalem leaders reveals a shared commitment to the same Gospel, albeit with different audiences. Paul’s ministry was to the “uncircumcision” (Gentiles), and Peter’s was to the “circumcision” (Jews) (v. 7). This division of labor reflects the ability of the Gospel to reach diverse groups without compromising its core truth.

Paul notes that the only request the Jerusalem leaders made of him was to remember the poor, which he eagerly embraced. In fact, Paul regularly solicited funds from the predominantly

Gentile churches to take to the impoverished believers in Jerusalem (see 1 Corinthians 16:1-4; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9:15; Romans 15:14-32). This reflects the nature of the Gospel to address both spiritual and physical needs, which is a truth also found in James' letter (James 2:15-17). The message of Galatians 2:6-10 ultimately demonstrates unity in diversity within the early church and challenges believers to prioritize the integrity of the Gospel while remaining sensitive to practical concerns like compassion and care for fellow believers.

Paul's unwavering defense of the message of Jesus Christ resonates with believers navigating today's maze of clashing ideologies, trendy philosophies, and traditions that sometimes feel like a buffet of distractions. In a world where the simple, life-changing truth of the Gospel can get buried under layers of noise, Paul's boldness and conviction are like a neon sign pointing us back to what really matters. His courage is a reminder that standing firm in Biblical truth isn't just an ancient pastime – it's a modern necessity. So, let's follow Paul's example. Let us hold tightly to the Gospel with both hands, ensuring it doesn't get watered down or lost in translation as we share it with others. After all, the Gospel isn't just good news; it's the best news, and it deserves to shine in all its transformative glory for generations to come.

2. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE DISREGARDED: Galatians 2:11-14.

A. Paul Confronts Peter for Compromise, Galatians 2:11-13.

This passage presents a critical moment in the early church. Paul's confrontation with Peter (Cephas) over hypocrisy offers profound insights into leadership, integrity, and the unity of the church. At the heart of this passage is the tension between Jewish and Gentile Christians in the early church. Certain Jews, claiming to be followers of Jesus (v. 12), believed adherence to Jewish customs, like circumcision, was necessary for salvation, even for Gentile converts. Peter, who had previously embraced fellowship with Gentiles (Acts 10), withdrew upon the arrival of certain Jewish Christians, likely out of fear of criticism or conflict.

Paul saw this as a serious issue. Peter's actions were not just a personal failing, but a public compromise that threatened the Gospel's core message: salvation by grace through faith, not by works or cultural identity. By withdrawing from the Gentiles, Peter implicitly endorsed the notion that they were second-class believers, thereby undermining the Gospel's universal nature. When Paul confronted Peter for this, he wasn't attacking Peter personally; he was defending the truth of the Gospel. Paul's boldness demonstrates that preserving doctrinal integrity sometimes requires difficult conversations, even with respected leaders.

B. Paul Rejects Requirement of Judaism, Galatians 2:14.

Verse 14 captures the confrontation between Paul and Peter. Paul's rebuke centers on a discrepancy between belief and behavior. He accuses Peter of not walking "uprightly according to the truth of the gospel." This phrase is key. The Gospel proclaims that all are justified by faith in Christ, not by works or adherence to the Law (v. 16). By withdrawing from Gentile believers, Peter's actions contradicted this truth, suggesting that faith in Christ was insufficient without adherence to Jewish customs.

Paul's question, "Why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?" (v. 14 NKJV), exposes the hypocrisy of Peter's actions. Though Peter himself lived freely from the Law (as evidenced by his previous fellowship with Gentiles), his withdrawal in Galatia implied that Gentiles needed to adopt certain Jewish practices to be fully accepted. This was not merely a mistake by Peter; it was a theological misstep with serious implications for the church's unity and purity.

Paul's bold choice to call out Peter "to his face" (v. 11) wasn't a quiet, behind-the-scenes chat – it was a public showdown in front of everyone who had been influenced by Peter's questionable behavior. Paul, who was never afraid of confrontation, knew that leadership isn't just about titles; it's about setting the right example. When leaders slip into hypocrisy, it takes everyone in the wrong direction. This moment reminds us how easily fear or peer pressure can lead us in the wrong direction, even when we know better. It's a challenge for us to take a hard look in the mirror and ask, are we living out the Gospel we preach, or are we playing follow-the-leader into a mess that undermines our integrity? Compromising our principles might win us temporary approval. But it will damage our credibility faster than we can say "awkward confrontation."

3. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE DEFENDED: Galatians 2:15-21.

A. Believers Are Not Justified by Works, Galatians 2:15-17.

These verses are critical to understanding the relationship between faith, works, and justification in Christian Theology. Paul stated, "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles" (v. 15). This is not meant to disparage Gentiles but to set the stage for his argument. As Jews, the Mosaic Law had shaped Paul and his contemporaries' understanding of righteousness. However, Paul quickly pointed out that even those born under the Law are not justified by its works but through faith in Jesus Christ (v. 16). Paul forcefully stated that obedience to the Law does not secure righteousness. Instead, a person is "justified" (declared righteous before God) only through faith in Christ. This was a radical departure from the Jewish belief that adhering to the Law was the pathway to God's favor.

Paul's point was that while adherence to the works of the Law is no longer required for righteousness, faith in Christ does not nullify the moral law or encourage sin ("God forbid," v. 17); instead, it reveals people's need for grace. Paul was not saying the moral principles of the Law must be abandoned. He argued that while the Law exposes sin, it does not empower a person to overcome sin or to live a righteous life. Only through Christ's atoning work can one be reconciled to God, and only through faith in the work of Christ can anyone be judged righteous before God. By placing faith above cultural or legal distinctions, Paul dismantled barriers between Jews and Gentiles. Paul invited followers of Christ to rest in the sufficiency of His work on their behalf. It was a call to abandon self-reliance and embrace the grace that justifies us through faith alone. In this manner, the Gospel unites all Christians – Jews and Gentiles – by tearing down the wall that once divided us (Ephesians 2:14).

B. God's Grace Is Enough, Galatians 2:18-21.

Paul emphasizes the folly and futility of returning to the Law after embracing salvation through faith. He states that rebuilding what was torn down – namely, reliance on the Law – makes one a transgressor (v. 18). This underscores the inconsistency of seeking righteousness through legalistic means after recognizing the sufficiency of the Gospel for salvation.

Paul personalized this point in verse 19, explaining that “through the law” he was “dead to the law” so that he might live for God. This marks a decisive move away from the Law as a basis for justification, embracing a life anchored in divine grace instead. Verse 20 serves as a cornerstone of Paul’s theology: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” This statement highlights the believer’s union with Christ, where self-reliance gives way to the indwelling presence of Christ. This theological perspective redefines the believer’s identity and purpose, centering it entirely on grace and divine empowerment.

Once again, in verse 21, Paul said righteousness cannot come through the Law; otherwise, Christ’s sacrifice would be in vain. If people could obey the Law and fulfill all righteousness perfectly, there would have been no need for Jesus to give His life as a sacrifice for sin. Salvation is a gift, rooted in faith and sustained by living in the power of God’s grace through Jesus to transform our lives.

The concept of being crucified with Christ challenges us to examine how our lives reflect our new identity in Him. It calls for a life characterized by humility, selflessness, and dependence on God’s grace. The Greek word translated as “I” is ego – a word used later in psychology to refer to the conscious part of one’s personality. It’s what we are aware of when we think about ourselves, and it’s the side we usually show others. Because of his faith in Jesus, Paul wanted others to see Christ in him as the key to his character and his personality.

CALL TO DISCIPLESHIP

As disciples of Jesus, we should always remain faithful to the teachings of Jesus. The world may try to turn us in different directions, but we must continue to be steadfast in the Gospel.

MINISTRY IN ACTION

Teaching is an important spiritual gift in the church. We should offer many opportunities and venues for people to “grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

Who Were the Galatians?

The people known as the Galatians were Celtic tribes originally from ancient Gaul (now France). About 280 BC, they migrated eastward invading Macedonia and Greece. From there, they invaded Asia Minor, causing widespread havoc, but eventually settled mainly in north central Asia Minor (now Turkey).

Adam Clarke, in his Commentary on the Bible, describes the original Galatians as having a religion that “was extremely corrupt and superstitious; and they are said to have worshiped the mother of the gods under the name of Agdistis, and to have offered human sacrifices of the prisoners they took in war.”

As described by historians, the original Galatians were tall and valiant people who went nearly naked and used only a sword and a small shield for fighting. But they were so ferocious and determined that they were almost irresistible, and this frequently made them victorious.

The Galatians ministered to by Paul and his colleagues were not like the original Galatians described above. For almost three centuries, the Galatians had married Greeks and adopted Greek civilization and religious beliefs. The Galatians came under Roman rule in 189 BC, and the southern region in Asia Minor called Galatia was made a Roman province by Caesar Augustus in 25 BC.

It is evident from reading Paul’s letter to the churches of Galatia that the churches he and Barnabas established there were made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers in Jesus as the Messiah (Galatians 3:26-29).

Because Paul ministered in synagogues, many of the Gentile converts to faith in Christ under his ministry were devout Gentiles who attended the synagogues and believed in the God of Israel. Because Paul also ministered in the markets and other public places, others of his Gentile converts were from idolatrous pagan religions. Doubtlessly, this was the case with the churches of Galatia.

WORKSHEET

An Apology for the Gospel

The Central Truth for this lesson declares, “The Gospel must be defended against all threats.” A theological term for this is “making an apology for the Gospel.” This is nothing like saying, “I’m sorry.” The Cambridge Dictionary defines such as apology as “a formal explanation or defense of a belief or system, especially one that is unpopular.”

In today’s lesson, the Apostle Paul takes a stand for the Gospel against the idea that Gentile converts must follow Jewish traditions to be considered genuine Christians.

The following Scripture passages identify three core Christian truths. For each, write the truth, and note any way you might have seen it under attack.

1. John 14:6

2. 2 Timothy 3:16

3. Matthew 25:46