

A STUDY IN GALATIANS
Part 7 – “Living Up to the Gospel”
Galatians 2:11-16

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Whenever we study the Scripture, especially the epistles of the New Testament, it is essential to keep the purpose of the letter in mind. All of the letters were originally written to a very specific church, or group of churches, to address a particular question or issue that had arisen. In the case of this letter, the Apostle Paul writes to encourage the Galatians to return to their original understanding of grace and faith. He is very direct and forceful reminding them of his calling and position given by the Lord Jesus. To accomplish his objective he shares some personal things relating to his position as an Apostle, undergirding his authority as an Apostle.

Additionally the passage reveals his status as independent of the Apostles in Jerusalem. Yet, he restates his commitment to the Gospel of grace. In fact, he is so committed to this message he will confront them when he goes to Jerusalem should he find they have deviated from it in the slightest measure. The preaching of Peter never deviated from the Gospel, though his practice left something to be desired as Paul saw it. Paul's evaluation was that they were not walking in the path of the Gospel laid out before them. Our text today has tremendous implications for us. **SO, LET'S LOOK AT THE SCRIPTURE. TAKE YOUR BIBLES AND TURN TO GALATIANS 2:11-15...**

When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, “You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.” (Galatians 2:11-16 NIV).

The heart of the passage is in verse 14 as Paul recalls the difference between talking and doing. **Talking the truth is only half of the matter. Paul declares we must also walk in the truth.**

THERE ARE THREE PRINCIPLES THAT ARE REVEALED IN THE TEXT:

FIRST, LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL INVOLVES RELATING TO OTHERS IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.

The Apostle Paul reasoned with the leaders in Jerusalem and prevailed in presenting his case for his mission to the Gentiles. They were compelled to admit that men are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and that alone. They were forced to admit that being Jewish offered no advantage at all in the act of salvation. However, they did not completely abandon their practice. They merely altered their message a bit. They began to teach that while being a Jew was not an advantage with reference to receiving the gift of salvation, it was a tremendous advantage in

gaining a place in the coming Kingdom of God. They declared that only the circumcised and those living by the laws of Moses could ever know the joy of being in the inner circle of the saints. Those careful of the laws of Moses were something special before God.

Just one of these “rules” involved their relationship with those who were not Jews. They believed that Jews were to have nothing to do with the Gentiles. They were not to do business with them, they were not to socialize with them, nor were they to have any contact with them in any regard. They were to always keep themselves separate because to be involved with anyone other than Jews would be defiling. **THAT’S WHAT THEY WERE PREACHING.** However, when Paul arrived at Antioch he found their practice was far different than their message. They openly fellowshiped and ate with the Gentiles. Even Peter freely joined in the practice. Of course, this was the message and instruction God had given Peter on the rooftop in Joppa at the house of Cornelius.

As often is the case, the others in Jerusalem found out about what Peter had done and convinced him of his “error.” This caused the Jewish Christians in Antioch to stop fellowshiping with the Gentile Christians. Even Barnabus was influenced by their persuasive arguments. Suddenly it was no longer the thing to do. Their belief had been changed to reflect their past beliefs prior to the grace of God in Christ. Their actions no longer matched their convictions.

THE ISSUE BECAME VERY CLEAR. Does being a Jew give one a spiritual advantage? Were the Gentiles losing out on something if they did not submit to becoming Jewish as well as Christians? Would spiritual advancement come if they were to adopt the ways of the Jews?

The Gospel declares that all men are sinners, and that the only thing that could make any difference was to place complete faith in Christ alone. Nothing else is necessary or beneficial in that miraculous act of mercy and grace. It is of Christ alone or it is not anything at all! This has tremendous application in our lives.

It affects how we are to share the Gospel with others. Let me ask some questions to emphasize this truth clearly. We preach that the blood of Christ is sufficient to forgive all sin. Yet suppose a known criminal comes forward and confesses their faith in Jesus, and asks for a place in our fellowship. Can they have a place in our fellowship? Oh, I know we would not fail to “vote” to receive them into membership, but would we receive them into our fellowship? Would we really receive them into our hearts and lives?

Last year I visited two very large churches both located in the same city. If I were to call their names you would immediately recognize one though the second might not have made it to your attention. I toured both facilities. One was built at a cost of \$112 million. It had everything you could possibly imagine on the campus. There were four different auditoriums for their four different styles of worship. Their children’s areas were all a different theme. In one age group it was the theme of an outdoor wilderness. They had stuffed animals, full bodied deer, elk, rams, bobcats, and other smaller animals placed in a setting designed to look and feel as if you were in the midst of the Rocky Mountains or Yellowstone National Park. Another location was themed after an aquarium and another after Camelot and King Arthur’s court. I was told that the decorations for these rooms cost over \$100,000 each. There was a different room for every age group from Kindergarten through Eighth Grade. The high school area was different. It was built in

an open concept that allowed them to gather in different areas. There were areas with all kinds of table games. That was pretty normal. However when I saw the area with four 55 inch wide screen TV's each hooked to a separate Wii, I was amazed at the extravagance. It went on and on.

The other church was a dilapidated K-Mart store that has been long abandoned and leased by the church for their ministry. When I took the tour of that facility I was told that they leased the facility and hoped to soon purchase the building, though they were not certain when they would be able to afford the cost. Their worship space was curtained off from the rest of the building and furnished with a hodge-podge of folding chairs and audio visual equipment that obviously had been cobbled together from various sources no longer finding use for it. It was a stark contrast!

One other thing stuck in my mind from the two tours. When I went into the first building I was met by a security guard who signed me in and gave me a visitor's badge identifying me as someone who had been given permission to be in the building. As we walked the facility, I saw a few staff members but no one else was in the building. The second church was a little different. As I approached the entrance to that church I was met by a man unloading fresh produce from the back of a truck. He stopped and introduced himself asking if he could help me. I told him who I had an appointment with and he took me inside. It was bustling with people. Some were arranging canned goods, others fresh produce and meat into boxes. There were others registering a long line of people who were then seated in an area near the tables with the boxes of food on them. I asked what was happening and told that since it was Tuesday, they were getting ready for their weekly distribution of food. They gave a week's supply of food to each family as they were identified and counseled. I asked how many people they served each week. He said it normally averaged around 2,000 families per week. Most of them had homes, though some were homeless. Many of them had become Christians through the ministry and were in recovery from addictions to alcohol and drugs. Another stark contrast was given!

Isn't that what our Gospel teaches us? The people of the second church were not affluent or prominent. They were poor and displaced, but their salvation was just as real as those that came to the other church. I am not saying that one of these churches was better than the other. However, we need to look carefully at how we relate to people. It ought to be based in the Gospel of Christ!

SECOND, LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL ENHANCES THE UNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

What happened in Galatia was ironic. Peter separated himself from the Gentiles because he did not want to offend the Jewish men from Jerusalem. If you had asked him about it, he would probably have rationalized that he was foregoing this privilege for the sake of the unity of the people of God. But the results were just the opposite. What he did caused a deeper division among the believers. The church became Gentile and Jewish. What God had always desired to be "one body" became two.

Nothing will bring about unity among the people of God like relating to one another in light of the Gospel. This is the clear example of the Galatian Church. The Judaizers who had infiltrated

the church produced a church within a church. They developed a group who felt as if they were somehow better than others in the church. They looked down on the poor, underprivileged Gentile Christians. They would say, "You have Jesus and salvation, but we have the Laws of Moses." Everything about this was contrary to the principles of the Gospel. Remember the Gospel plainly declares that one receives full status in the family of God through faith in the finished work of Christ. You cannot add anything to Jesus. There is no such inner circle in the family of God. When we live with this knowledge at the core of our belief it will produce unity not division. **Knowledge of the truth of the grace of God is the best preventative to pride and arrogance!**

THIRD, LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL EMPHASIZES THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL.

Can you imagine Peter trying to preach the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ to a Gentile congregation in Antioch after his actions? How many would have listened to him much less believed him? Who would have believed him if he declared that being Jewish was no advantage? No wonder Paul reacted so forcefully to the behavior of Peter and the others in leadership of the Jerusalem church!

In a bold and personal manner, Paul confronted Peter publicly. He wanted the issue to be settled once and for all. Too much was at stake, he had to have their answer in a public proclamation and therefore went to Jerusalem. What remains in the remainder of the chapter is a summary of that confrontation. It was settled in favor of the Gospel. I am convinced one of the reasons for this is the way in which Paul behaved. He didn't merely talk the talk, he walked the walk!

If we are to truly change our world we must be men and women like Paul! If we are ever to get the ear of our community we must amend our behavior to match our belief. Our message must match our action. We have preached love, we must live love. We have preached mercy, we must model mercy. We have preached generosity, we must be generous. We have preached forgiveness, we must forgive. When we say and do the same thing, people will listen to us!

Who do you identify with more, Peter or Paul?