

LESSON 7

October 15, 2023

Unit II: Faith Triumphs, Law Fails

One's Faith Is the Key

DEVOTIONAL READING: Galatians 2:1-10

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: Galatians 2:11-21

PRINT PASSAGE: Galatians 2:11-21

KEY VERSE

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. (Galatians 2:20b, KJV)

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“The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.” (Galatians 2:20b, NIV)

LESSON AIMS

As a result of experiencing this lesson, you should be able to do these things:

- Compare and contrast justification by faith and justification by law.
- Cultivate a love of living in Christ.
- Identify concrete behaviors that characterize a life guided by faith in Christ.

*KEY TERMS

Gentiles (verse 12)—Greek: *ethnos* (eth'-nos): a race, people, nation; the nations (as distinct from Israel).

Hypocrisy (verse 13)—Greek: *hypokrisis* (hoop-ok'-ree-sis): a reply, answer, playacting, dissembling; “dissimulation” (KJV).

Justified (verse 17)—Greek: *dikaioō* (dik-ah-yo'-o): (to have) shown to be righteous, declared righteous.

*(Word Study Supplement—Refer to page 2)

INTRODUCTION

The title for this lesson brings to mind the lyrics of an old song: “Prayer is the key to heaven, but faith unlocks the door.” The song was initially registered as “Faith Unlocks the Door” in 1955 by Samuel Scott, who added Robert L. Sande later that year and the prefix “Prayer is the key to heaven.” The importance of faith in the believer’s relationship with God



The Biblical Context

Paul is the author of at least thirteen New Testament books. He wrote some to individuals and others to churches. Paul wrote this letter to the churches scattered throughout Galatia, now a portion of Turkey. His primary purpose was to vindicate his divine call as an apostle and the Gospel of grace (see Galatians 1:6-7). Paul and the doctrine of salvation by grace alone were under attack by Jewish believers called Judaizers who still held to Jewish Law and traditions.

This group particularly insisted that circumcision was a requirement for Gentiles seeking salvation. After learning that church leaders were still teaching this heresy to the Galatians, Paul penned this epistle to emphasize believers' liberty in Christ and to counter the Judaizers' perversion of the Gospel. Paul condemned all who would diminish God's grace to change the Gospel's message (see Galatians 1:8-10). After giving his apostolic credentials (see Galatians 1:11-2:14), Paul emphasized that righteousness comes through faith in Christ and not the works of the Law (see Galatians 2:21). A significant theme of Galatians, and relevant to this lesson's purpose, is Galatians 3:11—"The just shall live by faith." Salvation is by faith, but daily we are responsible for exhibiting and maturing in our faith by applying the necessary spiritual disciplines to our lives.

continues to be a theme for study, sermons, prayer, and music among the faith community. What is faith in God? Experientially, faith in God means exercising trust based on a proper understanding of who He is, as revealed in the Bible. As the author of Hebrews explains, faith is the inner conviction that takes ownership of the right now of what we hope for and what God has promised for the future. Faith in God is not an "air castle" or "pie-in-the-sky" pipe dream but an inward response to His unfailing and trustworthy nature. Faith is also an outward response to God's trustworthiness and faithfulness to fulfill His promises. Those who possess faith are motivated to endure, persevere, and demonstrate resolute obedience despite physical and spiritual opposition (see Hebrews 11). The apostle Paul modeled this kind of faith when he boldly confronted Peter's hypocritical faith in Antioch to defend the "truth of the gospel," as it relates to justification by faith in Christ alone for Jews and Gentiles.

ANALYSIS OF THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Hypocritical Faith's Failure (Galatians 2:11-13)

KJV

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.

NIV

11 When Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

12 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.

13 The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

Galatians 2 opens with Paul's description of a second trip to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion on the Damascus Road. Accompanied by Barnabas and a Gentile Christian named Titus, Paul held a private meeting with the leaders of the Jerusalem church. He confirmed that the Gospel message he preached to Gentiles was the same as theirs—salvation is found only through faith in Christ, not the Law. The men formally agreed that Gentile Christians should not follow the Law and that Titus did not need to be circumcised. Peter, James, and John demonstrated their official approval of Paul and his message by extending the right hand of fellowship so others would accept him (see Galatians 2:3-10). Later, Peter visited Antioch and withdrew and separated himself from Gentile Christians when certain Jewish believers arrived, fearing their disapproval (**verses 11-12**). Paul refers to them as "certain men who came from James," Jesus' brother. Seeking to please the Jews and avoid conflict, Peter treated the Gentile Christians like they weren't Christians. His influential status led other Jewish Christians and Paul's friend and companion, Barnabas, to defect and treat Gentile believers present in like manner (**verse 13**). Based on a personal vision from God, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on believing Gentiles, and the agreement of the church's elders, Peter knew that God did not require Gentiles to follow the Mosaic Law to obtain salvation. Yet, Peter chose "peace over purity" and demonstrated a hypocritical faith by professing one thing but practicing another. Lest we condemn Peter too harshly, let us reflect on times when we have been guilty of "hypocritical faith" by refusing or excusing ourselves from standing on God's Word to save face or to avoid conflict.

When we profess to be "doctrinally sound" but don't "practice sound doctrine," we are hypocritical, demonstrate our faith is superficial, and are ashamed of Christ's Gospel. Peter's "playing false" was more impactful than his witness. It influenced all the Jews present and Barnabas to follow his example. Hence, when believers fail to demonstrate their professed faith, they can lead others astray. Therefore, to honor God and impact others for His glory, Christians must never fear or be ashamed to demonstrate their internal convictions publicly.

Q WHAT DO YOU THINK?

How does Peter's "faith hypocrisy" validate the statement "Practice what you preach"?

Bold Faith Triumphs (Galatians 2:14-19)

KJV

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?

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.

NIV

14 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?
15 “We who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles
16 “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.
17 “But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not!
18 “If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker.
19 “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.”

James (the author of the book bearing his name) makes the case that a person’s conduct and works are a sign of the kind of faith that he or she possesses. He states, “Now someone may argue, ‘Some people have faith; others have good deeds.’ But I say, ‘How can you show me your faith if you don’t have good deeds? I will show you my faith by my good deeds’” (James 2:18, NLT). According to **verse 14**, Peter’s actions proved that his faith at that moment was hypocritical, “dead” according to James. Paul’s was a living faith that motivated him to confront and call Peter out openly for separating himself from the Gentiles because he feared the Jews’ response. Paul rebuked Peter’s actions by reminding him that as a Jew, he used to live among Gentiles without barriers. Now he wanted Gentiles to live like Jews, something he didn’t do himself (**verse 14**). Paul wanted Peter to recognize the seriousness of his deception and its impact on the fellowship among these believers. Although Paul celebrated the advantages of Jewish heritage, the Law, and not being a Gentile sinner (**verse 15**), he eliminated the mistaken notion that anybody can be declared righteous by God through works of the Law (**verse 16**). Paul agreed with the Gospel message that Peter had been preaching—all are justified by faith in Christ alone. In **verses 17 and 18**, Paul answers his critics’ main objection against this truth. The group reasoned that if those justified by God continued in sin, that made Christ a servant of sin, to which Paul emphatically objected.

Salvation by God’s grace through Christ does not promote sin, neither does His forgiveness condone it. Hypothetically, Paul asserted that destroying legalism as the path to salvation and sanctification and then rebuilding it would be inconsistent with and violate grace’s standard. Because Christ paid the penalty for Paul’s failure to keep the Law by dying in his

place, he was now free to live for God and not the Law (**verse 19**). What we believe dictates our behavior, and people who genuinely believe in something act on it. Paul proved the genuineness of his faith and boldly confronted doctrinal error and hypocritical faith. What about us? There are multiple challenges to what we profess to believe as Christians. The question is whether we will respond like Peter or Paul. Bold faith triumphs every time.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

In what specific ways are Christians sometimes guilty of reverting to legalism in the church?

Bold Faith's Source (*Galatians 2:20-21*)

KJV

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.

NIV

20 "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

21 "I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!"

Verse 20 expands on Paul's declaration in the preceding verse. Paul details how he died to the Law, being crucified with Christ on the Cross. God effectively crucified Paul (and us) positionally or legally through Christ's crucifixion. Through Christ's death, burial, and resurrection, God joined believers to Christ and created a spiritual union that frees us from the obligation to the Law and allows us to live for God. Now, the indwelling Christ empowers believers through faith in Him instead of human effort and good works. The foundation of the believer's faith is Christ's sacrificial love that prompted Him to die in our place on the Cross willingly. Paul concluded his case against Peter and the other Jewish defectors by declaring that they had attempted to cancel God's grace by their standing with Judaizers. Therefore, Christ died needlessly (**verse 21**). By withdrawing from Gentile Christians, Peter's hypocritical faith openly denied the grace of God he had experienced and promoted the Law as necessary for salvation. Although there is no record of a response from Peter, the Scripture reveals that he repented and received restoration. The application for us is to allow the indwelling Christ to live through us as the empowering source of our faith in His finished work of salvation and the boldness to witness for Him.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

What is our role in developing bold faith as Christ's witnesses to the world?

A CLOSING THOUGHT

We are justified by faith in Jesus Christ's substitutionary death on the Cross—we are made right with God. Faith is also the key to experiencing a fruitful relationship with God. Therefore, we must prioritize developing an intimate relationship with Him so that we can demonstrate our faith to

1. remain steadfast and unmovable from the principles of His Word.
2. genuinely display our inward commitment to Him.
3. inclusively accept other believers.

YOUR LIFE

Our external actions signal our internal belief system. How consistently does your behavior as a believer communicate a life characterized by faith in Christ? Spend some time this week reflecting on that question. Then follow up your reflection by identifying an area of your life in which you must commit to becoming more consistent and genuine in demonstrating your faith in Christ.

YOUR WORLD!

Often in the church, some Christians have been guilty of separating themselves from other believers because of religious legalism. Since God justifies everyone who comes to Christ by faith, with your class (or church congregation), suggest ways to become more inclusive without compromising the basic principles of God's Word and the biblical pattern of salvation by grace.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious Father, thank You for justification by faith alone in Your Son, Jesus Christ. As we yield to the indwelling Holy Spirit's ministry, help us become more consistent in demonstrating our faith through godly behaviors that glorify You and edify others. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

CONCLUSION

(Preparing for Next Week's Lesson)

As you prepare for next week's lesson, ponder this question: "How can believers avoid trying to gain approval from God by keeping rules and regulations?"

Home Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY, October 16	"So Great a Salvation"	(Hebrews 2:1-9)
TUESDAY, October 17	"Christ Destroys the Power of Death"	(Hebrews 2:10-18)
WEDNESDAY, October 18	"Delight in the Law of the Lord"	(Psalm 1:1-6)
THURSDAY, October 19	"Blessed with Every Spiritual Blessing"	(Ephesians 1:3-14)
FRIDAY, October 20	"The Hope to Which We're Called"	(Ephesians 1:15-23)
SATURDAY, October 21	"Receiving the Spirit"	(Galatians 3:1-5)
SUNDAY, October 22	"Redeemed from the Law's Curse"	(Galatians 3:6-18)