

Galatians—Grace Above the Law *Our Freedom in Christ*

LESSON 3—Galatians 2

Drawing a Line in the Sand

In the Disney movie *White Wilderness*, released in 1958, there is a scene in which a herd of several hundred lemmings (small gopher-sized rodents of the Northwood's) purportedly follow a leader off a cliff, plunging into the frigid North Atlantic and their death in search of a migratory route. Twenty-five years later, BBC Canada revealed the lemmings had actually been chased off the cliff by the film crew to get the necessary images. The scene had been believable because of the well-known herd instinct possessed by most mammals. Webster defines the herd instinct in man as a “theoretical human instinct towards conformity.”¹ In humans we often call this peer pressure and succumb to its influence. We behave in ways which we normally wouldn't dream of without the external influence of peer pressure.

In this week's passage, we see the apostle Paul under tremendous pressure from the leaders of the church to believe and behave in contradiction to what the Lord had revealed to him. It has been said that *character* is how you act when you believe no one is watching you. It has also been said that *conviction* is how you act when everyone is watching you with disapproval. Paul proved to be a man of conviction.

Most commentators believe the events described in our passage this week occurred in Acts 15 while a minority view the visit to Jerusalem as the one described in Acts 11. Acts 15 is an account of Paul, Peter, and others giving testimony to the elders of the founding church in Jerusalem regarding God's working of salvation amongst the Gentiles. The Judaizers had argued that beyond

¹ <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/herd%20instinct>

accepting Jesus as their Savior, newly converted Gentiles must also strictly adhere to the Law of Moses. Following a discussion, the Jerusalem Council rendered its decision: “So we decided, having come to complete agreement, to send you official representatives, along with our beloved Barnabas and Paul,... to confirm what we have decided concerning your question. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay no greater burden on you than these few requirements: You must abstain from eating food offered to idols, from consuming blood or the meat of strangled animals, and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:24–29 NLT).

Their decision was in absolute agreement with what Paul believed based on the revelation God had given him. However, when the group from the Jerusalem Council arrived in Syrian Antioch to deliver this message, most of the delegation reverted back to practicing Judaism. Even Peter, the pillar of the church, and Barnabas, Paul’s beloved co-laborer on the First Missionary Journey, forsook the simplicity of the gospel and added Jewish tradition and laws to worship requirements. When so many got it wrong, where did Paul get the power to stay the course and hold to God’s truth? It’s simple math according to Frederick Douglas, a man of unwavering belief in the midst of controversy and conflict: “One and God make a majority.”²

This message seems particularly applicable today as we see the acceptance of moral decay in our country’s culture and even those within the church accept what is unacceptable according to God’s Word. I am reminded of the courage and conviction of the two dozen Coptic Christians who, on a worldwide stage, would rather suffer martyrdom at the hands of Muslim extremists than deny their love for Jesus.

Back to the lemmings in *White Wilderness*; despite their instinct to follow the leader of their group and the external pressure from the film crew, some lemmings actually did take a different path and survived. Sometimes we may feel like the lemmings in the movie with those around us pressuring us and the world herding us in a direction leading from God’s revealed will and a path ultimately leading to death. The good news is that God’s Word assures us that an alternate path is always available according to 1 Corinthians 10:13: “No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.” In addition, just as

² <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/f/frederickd105354.html>

God reassured Paul (see Acts 23:11 and Acts 27:23–24), we have His assurance that He will never leave us nor forsake us (Hebrews 13:5–6).

Prayer

Start by praying over the passage and asking the Holy Spirit to give you fresh insights and wisdom in understanding it. Then read through the entire passage two or three times.

Scripture Meditation/Memorization

One of the most fundamental and rewarding Christian disciplines that pays back in full spiritual dividends is Bible meditation/memorization. It is an absolutely fundamental in the formation of your spiritual development, spiritual walk and faith growth. In Psalm 1:1-2 (NLT), the Psalmist warrior, King David said,

*“Oh, the joys of those who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or stand around with sinners, or join in with mockers.
But they delight in the law of the Lord,
meditating on it day and night.”*

Use the suggested verse(s) to meditate on during the course of this week's study.

Memory Verse

“I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”—Galatians 2:20 (ESV)

Galatians 2:1-4—Paul Travels to Jerusalem to Confront Heresy

Because verses 1 (“fourteen years later we went again to Jerusalem”) could be anchored in different events, scholars are divided as to whether this visit is recorded in Acts 11 or Acts 15. Acts 11 starts with Barnabas engaging Paul in the ministry in Antioch and ends with them bringing an offering from that church to Jerusalem. Acts 15 records controversy as Judaizers from Jerusalem wreak havoc in the church in Antioch. This controversy is settled when Paul and Barnabas bring the matter before the elders in the Jerusalem council for resolution.

1. It has been said that a man is known by the company he keeps. What can we learn from the following verses about Paul’s traveling companions?

- a. Barnabas was Paul's partner on his first missionary journey. What can you glean about him from Acts 4:36–37, Acts 9:27, Acts 13:1, and Acts 14:14?

- b. Titus was a Gentile convert who also ministered alongside Paul. What can we learn about him from 2 Corinthians 2:13, 2 Corinthians 8:16, and Titus 1:4–5?

2. Paul and his ministry team were confronting a serious heresy. William Barclay said if it had been allowed to persist, this heresy would have reduced Christianity to merely a sect or denomination of Judaism. Not surprisingly, what initiated Paul's group to travel to Jerusalem and meet with the church leadership about this issue (verse 2)?

3. Paul had received the gospel from Jesus Himself completely independent of the church leadership (Peter, James, and John) in Jerusalem. What was the purpose of Paul sharing this gospel with them?

4. Freedom for believers in Christ from the Law is a central theme in Galatians. The word *freedom* appears eleven times in this short epistle. How was bringing Titus, a Gentile believer and minister of the gospel, to the temple before the leadership a test of Paul's gospel?

Galatians 2:5-10—*Paul Before the Disciples*

A quick reading of this passage may give the impression that Paul showed disdain for the church leadership, but this was not the case. The Judaizers had charged that Paul was a pawn of these leaders, only parroting their message, while in truth Paul’s message was identical but derived from an entirely different source, that of Jesus Himself.

1. Who were these false brothers and what were they teaching (see Acts 15:1–2)?

2. How did the “pillars” of the church respond to Paul’s gospel message?

3. It has been said that you will know men by the fruit that their life or ministry produces. If this meeting occurred after Paul completed his first missionary journey, there was evidence of the effectiveness of his message. As a result of this evidence what happened (read verse 9 carefully)?

4. Paul and Peter presented the same gospel (The King James Version incorrectly translates this to give appearance that it was two different messages) but to two very different groups.

- a. Who was Peter’s primary target audience?

b. Who was Paul's primary target audience (see Romans 11:13)?

5. What additional task was Paul asked to do (verse 10) and how is this in accordance with other teachings in the New Testament (see 1 John 3:17 and James 2:15–16)?

Galatians 2:11-16—*Paul Confronts Peter in Antioch*

Peter alternated between being a rock and a pebble. He told Jesus he would die for Him, only to deny Him three times later that night. In Jerusalem before the council, Peter delivered a passionate explanation of his firsthand witness of God's grace being extended to Gentiles apart from the law (Acts 15). Guided by the Holy Spirit, the council ruled that Gentiles would not be required to keep the Law of Moses (Acts 15:22–29). Fast forward a few days from this council's ruling to the apostle Peter in Antioch as we pick up the story.

1. It was a common practice in the early church to have an *agape* banquet; picture an early church potluck, coupled with communion.

a. What action did Peter take that won Paul's disapproval?

b. As an apostle and pillar of the church, Peter held a position of influence. What effect did his actions have on others?

2. Paul accused Peter of hypocrisy. Hypocrisy comes from the word describing masks that Greek actors wore to express the desired emotion (anger, love, etc.) without showing their true feelings. Why did Paul accuse Peter of hypocrisy?

3. What impact would this hypocrisy have had on the Gentile believers if Paul had allowed it to go on unchallenged?

4. *Can you think of any other situations where the truth of the gospel is compromised by the behaviour of those who claim to believe it?³

a. What should you do about it?

5. The Hebrews writer tells us that the Old Testament saints were commended for their faith, not their works (Hebrews 11:39). What do we learn from Hebrews 11:6?

³ Question taken from The Message of Galatians, The Bible Speaks Today commentary, Inter-Varsity Press-USA, 1986

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6. John MacArthur calls Galatians 2:15–16 one of the strongest statements in the New Testament on the doctrine of justification. The *Expositor's Bible Commentary* calls it the key verse summarizing the theology of the Book of Galatians. In your own words, explain these verses (hint: read them over in the New Living or Amplified Translations for better insight on what is being said).

Galatians 2:17-21—Paul's Defense

The Law reveals our sin but can do nothing to remove it. In doing so, the Law acts like a mirror, allowing us to see our true sinful nature. Not through keeping the law but only through the blood of Jesus are we justified before God. *Justified* is a legal term meaning not guilty of all charges before the law. To think, as did the Judaizers, that by undergoing circumcision, eating only Kosher foods, or keeping the Sabbath, we could add to or improve upon the sacrifice of Jesus is absurd, insulting to God, and outright blasphemous.

1. In verses 17 and 18, Paul anticipates an argument from the Judaizers in which they allege that relying solely on the blood of Christ for justification encourages us to sin. He deals at greater length and clarity with this issue in Romans 6:1–14. Briefly summarize what you learn from this passage.

2. There is so much theology and practical application in verses 19 and 20 that we could almost do a sermon series on these verses alone. From these verses, what do we learn about:
 - a. The effect the law had upon us

b. Our identity in Christ

c. The indwelling of Christ

d. The role of faith in believers

e. The motivation behind Jesus' sacrifice

3. Jesus said *"I am the Way...No one comes to the Father except through Me"* (John 14:6). How does verse 21 reinforce Jesus' words? For a bonus, see how Matthew 26:39 also indirectly gives additional support.

4. *Briefly explain the doctrine of justification by faith in terms that an unbeliever with no Bible knowledge could understand.⁴

⁴ Question taken from Galatians, Christ-Centered Exposition commentary, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn., 2014

5. *Martin Luther referred to justification by faith as the doctrine on which the church stands or falls. Why does this doctrine affect everything about the church's life and witness?⁵

Lesson 3 Summary/Take Away

If one of your friends at work or a neighbor were to ask you what you did on Tuesday, you would tell them you went to a Bible study. The next question would likely be, "What did you learn?" We often summarize an entire athletic contest or a movie in a few brief sentences and easily convey the essence of the event. Now apply these same skills to give a summary of the passage in a sentence or two. Then, in an additional sentence or two, describe what impact this passage will have on how you live.

Memory Verse

"I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."—**Galatians 2:20 (ESV)**

⁵ Question taken from Galatians, Christ-Centered Exposition commentary, B&H Publishing Group, Nashville, Tenn., 2014

Key Words/Phrases

Write out the definition of these key words. You can use a regular dictionary or go to one of the Greek sources listed in the Tool Box at the end of the study. You may also use a concordance to see where else and how the word is used in the Bible. *How would these phrases instruct or encourage us today?*

Liberty Which We Have in Christ (Galatians 2:4)

Right Hand of Fellowship (Galatians 2:9)

Justified by Christ (Galatians 2:17)
