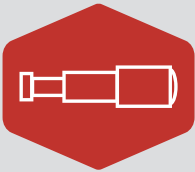




## Lesson 5: Living in the Crosscurrent

**Main Idea:** In this lesson, you will discover how difficult it is to live in the crosscurrent of gospel and culture—which Peter had to learn the hard way—and you will also discover how Christians can stand firm: by knowing that the gospel justifies us before God.

**Scripture:** Galatians 2:11–21



### The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

*What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.*

In the previous lesson, we studied how Paul traveled to Jerusalem where the apostles (Peter, James, and John) confirmed the accuracy of Paul's message: the gospel is faith in Jesus plus nothing else.

This lesson begins in Galatians 2:11 where Peter caused a problem so serious that Paul had to confront him publicly. According to New Testament scholar Craig Keener, "Paul's public confrontation . . . is dramatic and illustrates for his audience how fiercely committed Paul is to his gospel for the Gentiles."<sup>1</sup> Peter understood that God does not differentiate in His acceptance of people based on whether they are Jews or Gentiles, but his actions under pressure revealed hypocrisy.

Ironically, Peter had earlier received direct revelation of God's love for Gentiles. Acts 10:9–48 records Peter having a vision of a sheet filled with foods unclean

<sup>1</sup> Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 145.

for Jewish people to eat, and a voice telling him to “kill and eat” (Acts 10:13). After the third time this happened, the Holy Spirit told him that Gentiles were looking for him, and Peter was supposed to join them. They came and he accompanied them to the house of a man named Cornelius, a God-fearing Gentile, who had gathered with other Gentiles to hear a message from Peter. While Peter was preaching, all the Gentiles received the gift of the Holy Spirit, praising God in other languages. Peter told the Jerusalem church, “and they glorified God, saying, ‘Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life’” (Acts 11:18). They understood that salvation comes not by ethnicity nor anything people do except place simple faith in Jesus Christ alone.

Because of this, when Peter went to Antioch, he sat down to eat non-kosher food alongside Gentile believers—until a group from the Jerusalem church showed up.

These believers attended church where James was the pastor and spoke as though they had his authority. The Jerusalem church was quite different from the church in Antioch. They kept the Mosaic laws and ate kosher food. Peter saw them, feared their disapproval, and Galatians 2:12 says that, “When they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party.”

The table where Jews and Gentiles ate together had become a symbol of tremendous unity, but Peter was about to turn it into a symbol of division. Keener suggests Peter drew back because “it was easier to conform to their expectations than to try to persuade his associates in Jerusalem that his behavior with Gentiles in Antioch was acceptable.”<sup>2</sup> Whatever Peter’s reason, Paul, in verse 13, says Peter was acting hypocritically.

The word *hypocrite* in Greek comes from acting terminology. In the Greek culture of the day, actors used a mask on a stick rather than makeup. If actors wanted to portray sadness, they held a sad mask over their face. If they wanted to portray happiness, they held a happy mask over their face. The mask covered what the actor actually felt.

Paul confronted Peter’s behavior, not the content of the gospel message. Paul said Peter was not believing falsehood; he was acting contrary to what he believed.<sup>3</sup> Paul reminded Peter that he knew Jesus was enough for salvation—and that means people become right with God through their faith in Christ, not through keeping laws. Yet the *mask* of Peter’s behavior was so compelling that it influenced other Jewish believers to behave hypocritically, including leaders. Even Barnabas, minister to the Gentiles, missionary companion to Paul, and pastor of the Antioch church, joined with Peter in hypocrisy.

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<sup>2</sup> Keener, 148.

<sup>3</sup> Keener, 158.

In verses 5 and 14, Paul uses the same terminology, “the truth of the gospel.” The conflict between Paul and Peter was all about the truth of the gospel—faith in Jesus plus nothing else—that Peter and Barnabas had treated as untrue.

Unlike the meeting in Jerusalem where Paul sat down privately with Peter, James, and John, this meeting was public. In front of everyone, Paul asks Peter how he could “force the Gentiles to live like Jews” (verse 14). His separation from the Gentile table was forcing Gentiles to come under the law of Moses and live by its rules and regulations. Even if Peter never said this outright, his actions did: Professor of New Testament Robert K. Rapa says, “To acquiesce to Peter’s (hypocritical) actions would signal Paul’s *implicit* agreement to the attitude that was being *explicitly* communicated by the Galatian Judaizers.”<sup>4</sup>

In verse 15, Paul ends his story and speaks directly to the Galatians again. He explains that Jewish followers of Jesus know how people are justified—brought into right standing with God: through faith in Christ. Justification is what Christianity is all about. It does not mean God set aside justice in order to bring justification. Bible commentator Maxie Dunnam states, “To justify is to make right, not to make just or fair or equitable.”<sup>5</sup> God had punished His Son so the Galatian believers could be part of the family of God. Jesus Christ took the penalty deserved so the Galatians could be justified before God.

A simple way to understand justification is “not guilty.” Paul, in verse 16, explains that when believers accept Christ and what He accomplished for them on the Cross, a legal transaction takes place in their life. D. Thomas Lancaster, Director of Education at First Fruits of Zion, says,

Justification does not make you sinless; it does not impart righteousness into your being and make you suddenly a more godly person. Instead, justification is a legal verdict of “not guilty” in the court of heaven, even though you are guilty. Justified means “not punishable.” The justified person is reckoned righteous even if he is not.<sup>6</sup>

Does justification by faith mean it’s all right if a believer falls into lawless behavior driven by sinful desires? Not at all. Paul did not believe that receiving unearned justification entitles a believer to walk in lawlessness. He says in Romans 6:1-2, “What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it?” Paul always refuted the argument that sin is okay since a person doesn’t earn

4 Robert K. Rapa, “Galatians,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians*, rev. ed., vol. 11, ed. Tremper Longman III & David E. Garland (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 580.

5 Maxie D. Dunnam, *Galatians / Ephesians / Philippians / Colossians / Philemon*, The Preacher’s Commentary Series, vol. 31, ed. Lloyd J. Ogilvie (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1982), 43.

6 D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), 91.

salvation based on religious activities.

In Galatians 2:19, Paul tells the people that trying to be justified by the Law will kill them. Trying to earn right-standing with God through law-keeping makes a corpse. Does a corpse need more laws? No, a corpse needs life. That’s exactly what Jesus gives to those in relationship with Him—those who trust His finished work. Then as God keeps working in a person’s life, they live differently, bearing what Paul calls in Galatians 5:22-23 “the fruit of the Spirit.”

Paul articulates the focus of this letter (that is also the focus of his entire theology) in Galatians 5:20-21—which is so important that it should be viewed here before continuing:

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. I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.

Within those two verses, Paul identifies three key concepts for the Galatian church—and, by extension, to us: substitution, expectation, and motivation.

First, *substitution*: Jesus did not go to the Cross as a private citizen but as the substitute for humanity. The idea of a substitute or representative is one that the Jewish people understood and practiced regularly. In the positive sense, when David defeated Goliath (1 Samuel 17), it was counted to all Israel as their victory. In the spiritual sense, the sprinkling of an animal’s blood by Israel’s high priest once each year in the temple’s inner sanctuary (the Most Holy Place) represented the Israelites’ sins. In the ultimate sense, Jesus died for the sins of all people, not just the Israelites, representatively dying for us. It is as if we died with Him. This is why Paul says, “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Paul’s past-tense crucifixion here is symbolic and true: Paul was not physically crucified with Christ on the cross, but the person of Paul died with Christ. Now Christ lives in the person of Paul. Through accepting Christ’s death, the believer’s previous identity is gone; Christ is now their identity.

Second, *expectation*: that is, faith. In Galatians 2:20, Paul explains how he lives now: “by faith in the Son of God.” Think of this faith as looking up and looking ahead. In Numbers 21:4-9, God instructed Moses to form a bronze serpent so that when the Israelites suffered from snakebites, they would look up at it and live. The Gospel writer, John, mentions this: “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life” (John 3:14-15). Paul wants to know what the believers in Galatia are focused on: faith in their religious activities or

faith in their living relationship with Jesus?

Third, *motivation*: what should motivate the Galatians to live for Christ? Once people recognize that they are not justified by what they do but by what Jesus has done, their motivation to live a holy, righteous life comes from outside themselves. In Galatians 2:20, Paul identifies proper motivation as the motivation of Christ: love. Christ loved Paul and gave himself for Paul; Christ loved the Galatians and gave himself for them. Paul wants the Galatians to understand that Jesus willingly took the penalty they deserved. It was not a sterile, calculated business decision; it was unrelenting love. And this love should be the Galatians’ motivation for their new life in Christ.

Paul concludes this section (verse 21) by reminding the Galatians that righteousness does not come through the Law—so they should never try to earn what Jesus lovingly, freely gave. Righteousness is right standing before God with no sense of guilt, shame, or condemnation. It is based on relationship. Rapa comments,

In these verses Paul has expressed the crux of his theology of the Christian life: the believer has died to the law by virtue of incorporation into Christ, with whom the believer has been co-crucified. Life is now lived in union with him in a daily existence of faith outworked.<sup>7</sup>

So we see that faith in Christ is primarily about our relationship with Him. In their commentary on Galatians, pastor-authors David Platt and Tony Merida note the following:

When Paul says he has been crucified with Christ, he’s virtually saying, “It’s not the same ‘me’ anymore. It’s not the ‘I’ that tried to work for God and failed every time, nor the ‘I’ that thought the world revolved around me. The pride of the old ‘I’ directed everything to focus on self-esteem, self-confidence, self-direction, and self-exaltation. And it lived for personal pleasure and position. But my life is no longer about me,” Paul says, “because Christ lives in me.”<sup>8</sup>

Christ living in us: He can propel us past hypocrisy and give us strength to stand in the crosscurrent of the gospel and popular culture. Even when we face the pressure to conform, knowing that God has justified us in Christ—put us in right standing with Him—can help us stand firm. We could never add to the amazing, complete work He has done.

<sup>7</sup> Rapa, 587.

<sup>8</sup> David Platt and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in Galatians*, Christ-Centered Exposition, eds. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, (Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 2014), 49-50.

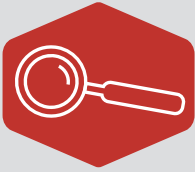


## My Lens (Eyeglasses)

*What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.*

Read these statements and write below or in your journal what these truths say to you:

- Follow Scripture rather than our personal preferences (Galatians 2:11-14).
- Our walk with Christ should be in step with the Gospel (v. 14).
- Our faith in Christ brings us a legal verdict of “not guilty.” (vv. 15-16).
- Accept believers of other ethnicities as brothers and sisters (vv. 15-18).
- Transformation of your soul and your spirit occurs when you make a full surrender to Jesus Christ as Lord of your life (vv. 19-21).
- Because I was crucified with Him, He lives through me (vv. 20-21).



## The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

*How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.*

Write down your answer to the following question here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.
  
- Who appears in this passage?
  
- Where is this passage taking place?
  
- When is this passage occurring?
  
- Why is this passage important?
  
- What is happening in this passage?
  
- How does this passage apply to my life?



- What was the primary insight for you from the conflict between Paul and Peter in Galatians 2:11–21?
  
- How would you explain justification to someone who has never heard of it? What easy-to-understand words and concepts would you use?
  
- What do you believe it means to live “by faith” (Galatians 2:20)? How is that different than living “by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7)?
  
- What differences would characterize someone motivated by guilt and fear versus someone motivated by love? Have you ever seen these two motives at work in your life? Please explain.







### Using My *Fire Bible*®

*Read the study notes for the following verses and articles in the Fire Bible and answer the accompanying questions.*

- **Galatians 2:11** What is a believer’s responsibility toward someone who has gone astray?
  
- **Galatians 2:12** Why did Peter deny his own principles?
  
- **Galatians 2:16** What does Paul deal with from this verse? Paul is not against the law. What is Paul against with regard to the law?
  
- **Galatians 2:20** What have Christians been freed from by accepting Christ? How does a believer live by the Spirit?
  
- **Galatians 2:21** Describe in your own words your understanding of grace and mercy. What does true righteousness involve?
  
- Look in your *Fire Bible* article index for the article “Biblical Words for Salvation.” Read it and then answer in your own words:
  - » What does salvation mean?



