

# Spirit-Filled Living Series

## The True Gospel (Gal. 2:15-16)

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By  
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### At A Glance:

- I. Introduction
- II. You Can be Restored to God
- III. Accept the Right Approach to Restoration
- IV. Avoid the Wrong Approach to Restoration
- V. Conclusion

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*These sermon study notes are designed to be a tool used after listening to the sermon. This resource is a guide to help deepen understanding regarding the Scriptures and ideas presented in the sermon. Those who use these study notes are encouraged to look up, read through, and think about Scripture references in this guide. There is more information in these notes than what is presented in the sermon. These study notes are designed to be used as an independent study tool to help the formation of Biblical convictions, character, and conduct.*

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# The True Gospel

## I. Introduction

### A. Illustration: The Gospel of Latter-Day Saints

1. Asking the question “How does a person get right with God?” will lead to one of two destinations. We will answer that question the way Jesus and true Christianity does, or we will answer that question the way every other religion with a distorted gospel does. One such example comes from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.
2. In chapter 8, “Salvation Comes through Jesus Christ,” of *Teachings and Doctrine of the Book of Mormon Teacher Manual*, it says:<sup>1</sup>

Remind the students that while we are saved only through the merits, mercy, and grace of Jesus Christ, the prophets in the Book of Mormon taught what we must do to access the Savior’s redeeming power.

Ask students to read 2 Nephi 25:23: <sup>23</sup> For we labor diligently to write, to persuade our children, and also our brethren, to believe in Christ, and to be reconciled to God; for we know that it is by grace that we are saved, after all we can do.<sup>2</sup>

What doctrine did Nephi teach regarding our salvation? Because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ, we can be saved by grace after all we can do.

3. This same idea is also communicated in chapter 12, “The Atonement,” of *Gospel Principles*:<sup>3</sup>

Christ’s Atonement makes it possible to be saved from sin *if* we do our part.

But because of Him, if we will keep His terms, which are to repent and keep His commandments, we may return to live with our Heavenly Father.

- B. According to Mormonism, human action is necessary and required for salvation (but not sufficient). There are plenty of distortions of the true gospel that claim we must do acts or give effort to experience the favor, blessing, or acceptance of God. The apostle Paul calls these “works of the law” throughout Galatians.<sup>4</sup> Contrary to this false gospel stands the true gospel communicated by Paul, the gospel of grace. The favor, blessing, and acceptance of God is given through Jesus as a gift of God’s generosity, and no action on our part is required—although a

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-and-doctrine-of-the-book-of-mormon-teacher-manual/lesson-8-salvation-comes-through-jesus-christ?lang=eng>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-teacher-resource-manual/the-second-book-of-nephi/2-nephi-25-30?lang=eng>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-12-the-atonement?lang=eng>

<sup>4</sup> The gospel of the Latter-day Saints claims to reject earning grace but requires effort to access it. On my view, earning benefits from God through behavior is built into their gospel as “The gift of eternal life, which is promised only when certain conditions are met” and “only those who obey the fulness of the gospel law will inherit eternal life” according to Elder L. Tom Perry “*The Gospel of Jesus Christ*” *Ensign* or *Liahona*, May 2008, 44-46. If any human action is REQUIRED to be made right with God, that gospel is no longer grace. More detail on this will be given in a future message regarding the Mormon’s progression of salvation.

change in perspective and attitude must take place.<sup>5</sup> This central truth of the message of God is Paul's primary focal point in the letter of Galatians.

- C. Those who are following Jesus can develop the skill of discerning the true gospel that comes from Jesus from false distortions of the true gospel by understanding the core truth communicated in Galatians 2:15-16. The true gospel of Jesus teaches one specific way of being reconciled to God. We must get the way to be made right with God correct if we are going to recognize and hold to the true gospel. The difference between the true gospel of Jesus and distortions of it can be very subtle and easy to miss if we are not paying close attention.

## II. You Can be Restored to God

- A. The central focus on this entire letter is seeking to answer the question: How can a person be made right with God?<sup>6</sup> The way God brings a person into right relationship and standing with Himself is the topic of conversation. Theologically, this doctrine is called justification.<sup>7</sup> Justification is the way God has chosen to reconcile and restore a person to Himself. Justification, how a person is made right with God, is at the core of the gospel.<sup>8</sup> There is also a strong emphasis on explaining what the lifestyle that pleases God looks like—the expected and natural outcome of justification. Justification is the point of difference between the true gospel communicated by Paul and the distortion of the true gospel communicated by the false teachers.
- B. Disciples respond to Jesus in a particular way to receive a beneficial result from God:  
<sup>16</sup> so that we may be justified (Gal. 2:16)
- C. In these words, the core doctrine of the letter of Galatians comes into view (“so that we may be justified”, v. 16).<sup>9</sup> To be justified, or made right with God, is to be or become judicially validated as having complied with the law of God—to be legally declared innocent.<sup>10</sup> A person's final justification will come on the day when they stand before Jesus during the judgment of God; this justification is yet future (“no flesh will be justified”, v. 16).<sup>11</sup> In justification, God declares a person legally righteous on the basis of their legal connection to Jesus and then works within them to actually make them righteous in sanctification. God tells us we are in the right.<sup>12</sup> Like an unconscious patient in an operating room, justification is a soul surgery that God performs on us. We aren't justifying ourselves; we passively receive while God does the work that is needed.

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<sup>5</sup> See Jesus' brilliant explanation of the difference between the true gospel and its distortion in Luke 18:9-14.

<sup>6</sup> Same question being asked in Job 9:2

<sup>7</sup> For a robust explanation of justification from Paul see Romans 3-6.

<sup>8</sup> J. V. Fesko, *Galatians*, ed. Jon D. Payne, The Lectio Continua Expository Commentary on the New Testament (Powder Springs, GA: Tolle Lege Press, 2012), 31.

<sup>9</sup> The verb justify is used 8 times in Galatians, three times in this verse and Gal. 2:17, 3:8, 3:11, 3:24, 5:4. It also occurs 15 times in Romans (Rm. 2:13, 3:4, 3:20, 3:24, 3:26, 3:28, 3:30, 4:2, 4:5, 5:1, 5:9, 6:7, 8:30-2 times, 8:33). Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 155.

<sup>10</sup> Logos 10 Bible Study Software Exegetical Guide on Galatians 2:16 “justified”

<sup>11</sup> David A. deSilva, *The Letter to the Galatians*, ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 216, Thomas R. Schreiner, *Galatians*, Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 167.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 191.

- D. Those who are justified enjoy a standing of being in right relationship with God.<sup>13</sup> Once a person is justified, their spiritual condition before God is lived in grace (Rm. 5:1-2). Those who are justified live in the undeserved favor of God as God continually provides unearned benefits. These individuals are at peace with God and living harmoniously with Him in an environment where they continually experience His favor and love. Even though those who are justified are continually learning what it means for them to live in ways that are pleasing to God, there is no condemnation from God for anything they fail to do (Rm. 8:1).
- E. There are two options available to be brought into right legal status, relationship, and lifestyle with God: faith or works.<sup>14</sup> Throughout this letter, the apostle Paul puts these two options against one another and argues that the only option that effectively makes us right with God is faith in Jesus. We will explore each option in more detail later.
- F. At the core of the theological truth of justification is the idea that a person is declared morally innocent by God regarding a person's legal and relational status with Him:
  - <sup>9</sup> Much more than, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. (Rm. 5:9)
- G. Jesus not only invites everyone into a right relationship with God He also promises that He can make this happen. Do you believe this? I've met many people who falsely think they are too far gone, too broken, have done too many wrong actions, or have done something too bad they've gone past the point of no return for God to love and forgive them. However, Jesus can even save the worst of sinners like Paul—someone who was actively going around persecuting and approving of the killing of God's people. Even if you're feeling weighed down by guilt and shame, Jesus has the power to restore you to God. You can't break yourself or your life so bad that Jesus can't fix it. Jesus can restore your relationship with God so that God is no longer angry with you, and you can be safe in the judgment of God, protected from any divine punishment you have earned. Jesus invites us to live the rest of our lives at peace with God. Do you want this?

### III. Accept the Right Approach to Restoration

- A. There is an ongoing invitation from Jesus to everyone who hears His message, to take advantage of the opportunity to be restored to God by being made right with God through the forgiveness provided by Jesus. We are offered the opportunity to be at peace with God the Father. People are brought to a right standing and relationship with God, the opportunity is accepted, through an attitude of trust in Jesus (called faith in the Bible):
  - <sup>16</sup> by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16)
- B. Faith is further explained in the statement coming just prior: to have faith in Jesus is to believe in Jesus as the Messiah ("we have believed in Christ Jesus", v. 16). The title Christ is a reference to Jesus being the Messiah—the special ruler sent by God. To believe in Jesus signals a response

<sup>13</sup> Ronald Y. K. Fung, [The Epistle to the Galatians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 113.

<sup>14</sup> While many assume we must choose between the legal and forensic understanding and the practical and ethical understanding of justification, a more careful reading of Paul's teaching on the doctrine of justification will reveal Paul includes both elements within justification (Rm. 2:13, 3:28). It is a both/and situation not an either/or situation. Richard N. Longenecker, [Galatians](#), vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 85.

of commitment of oneself to Jesus.<sup>15</sup> Acknowledging Jesus as the authority of our life and doing what He says is the natural attitude of genuine faith (Lk. 6:46). Believing in Jesus is an attitude of trust and commitment within the loving relationship initiated by Jesus. Having faith in Jesus trusts that Jesus is telling the truth and is good enough to do everything He promised as the grounds for a deep, personal commitment to Jesus. This genuine soul-saving trust in Jesus changes who we are as a person and becomes the energizing force of our spiritual life.

C. Abraham serves as the prime example of how justification works:

<sup>6</sup> Just as Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. (Gal. 3:6)

D. Abraham was justified (“credited to him as righteousness”, v. 6).<sup>16</sup> God responded to Abraham this way because of his faith (“Abraham believed God”, v. 6). God made a promise to Abraham, a promise that was impossible from human perspective and ability, but because God said it, Abraham trusted it. God promised Abraham many descendants that would come from a child he would have. Abraham’s acceptance of the word of God and his attitude of trust in God was an expression of faith. God responded to the faith of Abraham by declaring and crediting Abraham with righteousness. This is justification at work.

E. By the means of faith (an attitude of trust), a person is united with Jesus and declared righteous by God the Father. Accepting the words of God as true and trusting them is an expression of faith. Trust specifically in Jesus’ claim to have the ability to forgive sins because of His death and resurrection is the expression of faith that justifies us before God the Father. Paul explains the content of faith that leads to justification in greater detail:

<sup>9</sup> that if you confess with your mouth Jesus *as* Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; <sup>10</sup> for with the heart *a person* believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation, (Rm. 10:9-10)

F. Faith as understood and explained by Paul has two fundamental elements to it: 1) Acknowledging Jesus as the Messiah and 2) Accepting Jesus as the only way to have our disobedience to God (called sin) forgiven. The first fundamental element of faith is clearly observed in Paul’s clarifying statement about the nature of faith (“Jesus as Lord”, v. 9). Trust in Jesus is reflected in our attitude of submission to the authority of Jesus. Jesus is our Lord, the owner of our life—I belong to Him. Jesus, as my boss and owner, has the right to tell me what to do. Jesus’ teachings authoritatively tell me how to live. My greatest responsibility in life is to learn to act on what Jesus says.

G. The second fundamental element of faith is affirming Jesus is the only way to be forgiven and restored to God the Father (“believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead”, v. 9). Jesus gave Himself for our sins (Gal. 1:4). The resurrection of Jesus is the testimony of God

<sup>15</sup> Richard N. Longenecker, [Galatians](#), vol. 41, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1990), 88, Ronald Y. K. Fung, [The Epistle to the Galatians](#), The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988), 115, David A. deSilva, [The Letter to the Galatians](#), ed. Ned B. Stonehouse et al., The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018), 237.

<sup>16</sup> Being credited with righteousness means that the righteousness given by God is not native or natural to us as human beings, it is given to us from the outside (Rm. 3:28, 4:3-6, 4:8-11, 8:22-24). Thomas R. Schreiner, [Galatians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 157.

proving Jesus is the Judge who will carry out the judgment of God on the day of Judgment (Ac. 17:31). Every person is required by God to change how they are living to be right with God—called repentance. The forgiveness that is available through Jesus is being proclaimed to the whole world (Lk. 24:47, Ac. 10:43). Those who accept all this as true express genuine faith in Jesus.

- H. How do you respond when you know you've done something wrong? Some people feel so uncomfortable when they are guilty that they deny that they've done anything wrong. That way, they can ignore and dismiss any of the negative consequences. Lying is a common coping strategy. Another strategy is to blame others for what happened. Others hide. They work hard to make sure no one will find out what they've done. Any evidence of wrongdoing is covered up. They put on a show with others and pretend to be someone they are not. All of us are experts at rationalizing and justifying our actions. We will make up all sorts of reasons for why we aren't wrong, did the best we could under the circumstances, had no choice, or think it impossible to do what we ought to have done. Another type of response acknowledges our guilt, so we try to punish ourselves for what we've done. We find ways to suffer intuitively knowing that is what we deserve for doing wrong. Some people respond to their own guilt by trying to make up for it by doing good for others hoping the good they do can make up for the wrongs they've done.
- I. Those who live according to the true gospel confess what they've done to God and those who have been negatively impacted. They ask for forgiveness and depend on Jesus for their ongoing need, realizing Jesus does not condemn them and has dealt with that wrong on the cross. Receiving forgiveness from Jesus is not a one-time event that happens when we turn our lives over to Jesus. It is a constant reality of living with Jesus for the rest of our lives. Jesus is still in the process of cleansing those who belong to Him of their sin. We are a work in progress. We look forward to the day when Jesus completes His work in us (Phil. 1:6).

#### IV. Avoid the Wrong Approach to Restoration

- A. The true gospel proclaiming the idea that a person is made right with God through their trust in Jesus as an act of God's grace is incompatible with and contrary to the notion that a person can be good enough and faithful in carrying out the requirements of God to earn the favor of God through their own human achievement:
  - <sup>16</sup> and not by works of the Law (Gal. 2:16)
- B. It is impossible for any person to be obedient to the word of God and morally good enough to be made right before God by our own effort ("not by works of the Law", v. 16).<sup>17</sup> Anyone who is living by the works of the law are obligated to keep the whole law (Gal. 5:3).<sup>18</sup> The critical point here is that no person, whether Jew or Gentile, will be declared to be right with God through their ability and performance of keep what the word of God requires (specifically the Jewish law).<sup>19</sup> There is no effective means of self-justification—every person who tries to stand before

<sup>17</sup> Romans 3:20-22

<sup>18</sup> It is important to remember that the word of God, the Law, is good when it is used the way God intended (Rm. 7:14, 1 Tim. 1:8). Using the word of God to justify oneself is a misuse of the word of God (Gal. 5:4).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas R. Schreiner, [Galatians](#), Zondervan Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2010), 154.

Jesus on their own merits will fail. To prove his point, Paul provides Scriptural proof from Psalm 143:2.

- C. So strongly is Paul opposed to this idea contained in the distorted gospel of the false teachers that he repeats the same point three times in one verse to make his point unmistakably clear:
- <sup>16</sup> nevertheless, knowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law; since by works of the Law no flesh will be justified. (Gal. 2:16)
- D. In three different ways, Paul emphasizes the point that it is impossible for any person to be good enough at obeying God that they can be found by their own moral goodness to be right with God (“knowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law”, “not by works of the Law”, and “since by works of the Law no flesh will be justified”, v. 16). Because all human effort is doomed to fail, this is why Jesus came and gave His life to save humanity (Gal. 2:21). Paul is referring here to those who are seeking to be justified by obeying the law (Gal. 5:4).
- E. What are the works of the law? Generally, works of the law are deeds or actions that are required by the Law of Moses (primarily Leviticus and Deuteronomy).<sup>20</sup> Certainly these works of the law include circumcision (Gal. 2:3, 5:3), Jewish food restrictions (Gal. 2:12, Lev. 11), keeping the Sabbath and other Jewish festival days along with the year of Jubilee (Gal. 4:9-10), and everything that is required in the writings of Moses (Gal. 3:10, 3:17)—including the book of Genesis (Gal. 4:21-22). On Paul’s view, those who perform the works of the law are obligated to keep the whole law—everything that is required by the law (Gal. 3:10, 5:3).
- F. Here is how Paul explains his own personal experience in living under the law:
- <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever things were gain to me, these things I have counted as loss because of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them *mere* rubbish, so that I may gain Christ, <sup>9</sup> and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from *the* Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which *comes* from God on the basis of faith, (Phil. 3:6-9)
- G. While Paul was an expert and really good at living in a way that obeyed the commandments of God ( “as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless”, v. 6), he eventually realized his obedience and moral performance were not good enough to be acceptable to God (“count them mere rubbish”, v. 8). Paul came to realize his own righteousness and moral performance was inadequate and he needed a better righteousness that came from God through Jesus (“be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but what which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith”, v. 9). This fundamental truth about human moral goodness is known and understood

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<sup>20</sup> Robert K. Rapa, [“Galatians,”](#) in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Romans–Galatians (Revised Edition)*, ed. Tremper Longman III & Garland, David E., vol. 11 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2008), 583, James D. G. Dunn, [The Epistle to the Galatians](#), Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1993), 135.

by all disciples (“knowing that a person is not justified by works of the Law”, Gal. 2:16). Human effort does not make us the type of person God wants us to be. We can’t fix ourselves.

- H. Plenty of people do what God wants because they feel like they have to, not because they have the genuine desire to do so. Here in lies the problem. Obeying the law and performing the actions commanded by God can be done on the outside without being a good person on the inside. Human moral brokenness makes it impossible for our good actions to please God. Jesus explained how this works in Matthew 5:21-6:18 and 23:5-7. Just because a person does the correct actions doesn’t mean the actions are being done from the source of moral goodness. Every act of obedience to God should be done from the motivation to love God and the desire to please Him. This heart attitude can only be produced from Jesus working in us—a righteousness coming from faith.
- I. It is easy to assume that anyone who believes in Jesus has avoided the distortion of the gospel Paul is talking about here. But, as we learn from Peter’s example, this is not always the case. As Peter is getting confronted by Paul (Gal. 2:11-14), Paul is pointing out the inconsistency of Peter in his implementation of his Christian convictions.<sup>21</sup> Peter gives verbal and intellectual assent to the truth that a person is justified exclusively by faith in Jesus. Yet, at the same time, Peter is acting as if he needs to avoid fellowship with those who are not following the Jewish rules regarding food—Peter was taught better by God (Ac. 10:9-20, 28-29). There is an inconsistency between what Peter says he believes and how he acts. Peter knew what God’s perspective is on this topic, but he compromised because of the social pressure being put on him by others (Gal. 2:12). Peter allowed the fear of others influence his behavior more than his godly convictions. This is a spiritual danger we must all be on the lookout for.
- J. As disciples, we need to become wise and discerning by acting in conformity with the conviction we claim to believe in. We can’t say we hold a conviction to be true and act in ways contrary to that conviction at the same time. We must live in conformity with our convictions. While this type of belief and behavior discrepancy can be done knowingly or unknowingly, the goal remains the same: our conduct should align with our convictions. Part of growing in the Christian life is bringing our deeds into harmony with our doctrines.
- K. There may be times that we will need to sacrifice important relationship with those we care deeply about to act faithfully toward Jesus. We may even have to choose the love we have for Jesus ahead of the love we have for family and friends. It is becoming more common for us today to feel the pressure put on us from others to compromise our convictions to make others happy. In these types of situations, we must stand firm with Jesus. Holding onto Jesus may cost us our relationships with others, but that is a price we must be willing to pay so the true gospel isn’t compromised.

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<sup>21</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *The Epistle to the Galatians*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1993), 138.

**V. Conclusion**

- A. The true gospel is a gospel of grace that offers forgiveness as a generous gift of God. Once we receive forgiveness and a right standing with God by trusting the message of Jesus, we can enjoy peace with God for the rest of our lives. We can confidently face the future knowing that we will pass safely through the judgment of God without being punished. Possessing this peace of mind changes the whole emotional tone of our relationship with God.
- B. By understanding the true gospel, we can identify and reject all distortions of the message of Jesus. We gain valuable discernment and can protect ourselves against the false religious systems that oppress people by requiring them to perform for the benefits of God. The true gospel leads to a lifestyle of spiritual freedom.