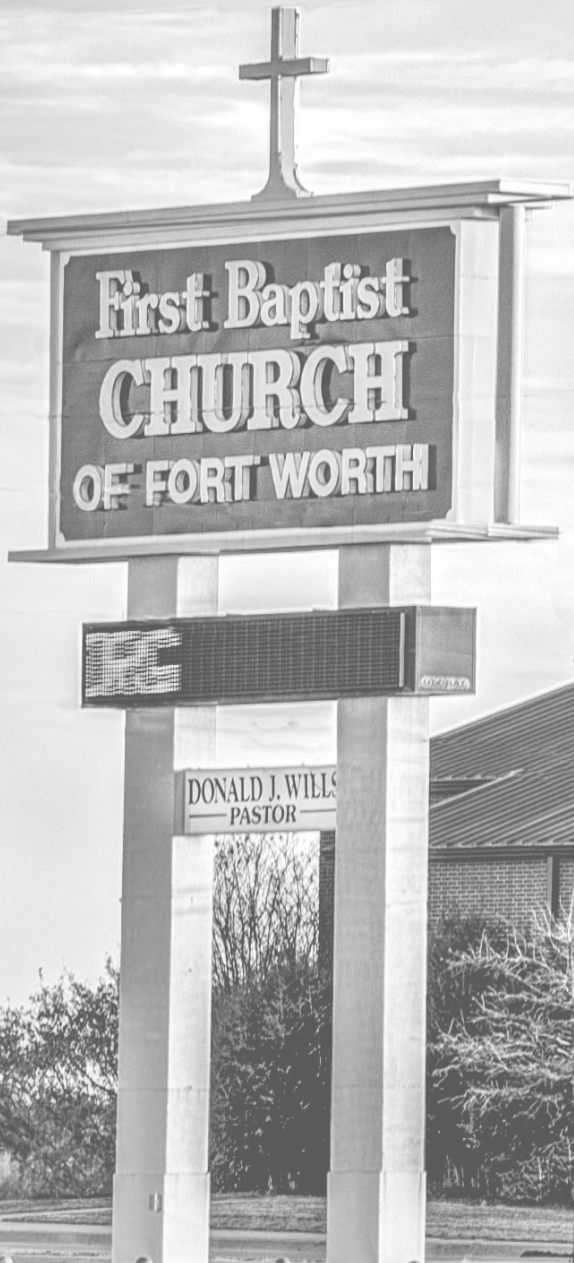
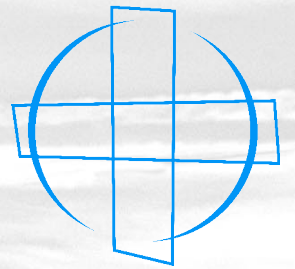


APRIL
2024

Donald J. Wills
Senior Pastor

LIVE



The purpose of First Baptist Church of Fort Worth is to **introduce** people into a loving relationship with Jesus, **instruct** them in spiritual growth through God's Word, **inspire** them to serve for God's kingdom, and **incorporate** them in authentic worship to glorify God.

A Note From Our Pastor

Dear FBC family and friends,

Christianity should not be simply a label we wear, but the life we live. Too often, people add Christian to-dos to try to check all the boxes. However, being a Christian is not something you do; it is who you are. We cannot “do” ourselves into living the Christian life any more than we can into being a Christian. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes that pretty plain. It is out of the essence of who we are that we conduct ourselves. In this study of Galatians, you will see Paul’s point is best defined in 2:20: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” It is Christ in you that works His way out as evident in our thoughts and actions because of the recognition of whose we are. We are His!

As a reminder, the layout of this Curriculum begins with a 7-day approach for both the teacher and the members to get the most from each study. We also acknowledge that teachers may have their own methods for preparing the lessons and we encourage them to prepare in the way that makes them most effective in presenting God’s Word and the weekly lesson. We also encourage each teacher and member to use the suggested 7-day approach for their own personal study and encouragement.

This second quarter of 2024 the theme is “Live.” The challenge is to live each day filled with the Holy Spirit as described in Galatians 5:25. May we leave no doubt in the minds of those we encounter in the coming days to whom we belong. It is Christ in you!

Blessings,
Pastor Don Wills



Suggested Plan for Using this Bible Study Guide Effectively

Introduce

Day 1: Read and meditate on the Scripture, asking God to guide you throughout the week as you study His Word and allowing Him to speak to you through the Spirit. Read the **INTRODUCE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Instruct

Day 2: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and read the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary. Concentrate on memorizing the focal verse for that particular week.

Day 3: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and answer the focal questions in the **INSTRUCT** portion of the lesson commentary.

Inspire

Day 4: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and begin thinking about tangible ways you can incorporate the principles you learned into your daily life. Read the **INSPIRE** portion of the lesson commentary.

Incorporate

Day 5: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and apply the theological principle that you learned from this week in a tangible way. Use the **INCORPORATE** portion of the lesson commentary to guide you.

Day 6: Read the Scripture, meditate on it, and in the journal section describe how God allowed you to apply this passage in a real and tangible way this week.

Day 7: Review the Scripture and share with others in your Connect Class on Sunday morning at 9:30 am. Be ready to share your experience about how God allowed you to apply the lesson for that week.

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April 7, 2024

Live Consistently

[*Galatians 1:1-17*](#)

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April 14, 2024

Live Cooperatively

[*Galatians 2:1-10*](#)

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April 21, 2024

Live as Christ

[*Galatians 2:11-21*](#)

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April 28, 2024

Live by the Crucifixion

[*Galatians 3:1-9*](#)

April 7, 2024

CONSISTENCY



Live Consistently

Galatians 1:1-17

Focal Verse:

"I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel."

Galatians 1:6

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Introduce

Several years ago, I took my car for an oil change, but in the haste of completing the task, the mechanic forgot to reset the warning light on the dashboard of my Honda Accord. Running through all the settings on the digital menu, I couldn't figure out how to reset it myself. Despite all the advancements in technology for cars at the time, the manufacturer didn't create a button which one could simply press to reset the warning light. Rather than look at the manual which came with the car, I decided to search for instructional videos on YouTube. After all, it would be much easier to search online than to get the manual, go through the index, hopefully find the right page, and then read a complex set of instructions.

So, I took my laptop with me to the garage and searched "resetting the oil light on 2004 Honda Accord" in hopes of finding a video to guide me through the process. The search generated hundreds of results. An exhaustive investigation on the background

and qualifications for each of the video's producers would prove more time-consuming than reading the manual! Which video should I trust? Which video would have the most accurate information and be the easiest



to follow? Generally, we click on the first link because we trust the algorithm of the website to pull up the most-popular videos on the subject. As a result, we sometimes believe, rather errantly, that it contains the most accurate information.

Having clicked randomly on the first video, an owner of a Honda Accord, not an expert in the field or even a mechanic, began explaining the process for resetting the light. While holding the button that toggled between the odometer and trip readings for mileage, the gentleman bid the audience to turn the key to the second position on the ignition just short of starting the car. After holding that button for ten seconds the "maintenance required" light should disappear. Counting at a slow, steady pace, he finished, "Three, two, one," but nothing happened. The light did not reset. Surprised

Introduce

at the turn of events, he began to wonder aloud, “What went wrong? Did I count too fast?” So, he reduced the speed at which he counted, but that still didn’t fix the problem. Several times during the video he restarted the process until at one point he accidentally switched the mileage from Trip B to Trip A. Suddenly, after repeating the process, the light disappeared from the dash.

At the end of the video, he concluded based upon trial and error that to remove the warning light it needed to be set on Trip A, not Trip B. To reset the light, owners of Honda Accords must follow the plan exactly as designed. Deviating from it in the slightest will not produce the desired results. Fortunately, this man on the YouTube video discovered the right method by accident. When it comes to eternal life, however, we cannot afford to guess and hope that we discover the secret somehow through trial and error. And we don’t have to guess if we rely upon God’s instruction manual—the Bible!

In life, however, many want to take shortcuts or follow the popular opinions of the crowd. Rather than taking time to read God’s Word for themselves, they rely upon what other people tell them. But they will soon discover that those ways do not work. Unfortunately, some in the churches of Galatia had begun to turn to what other people said about salvation rather than retain the truth which God disseminated through Paul during his first missionary journey to the region. These false teachers had corrupted God’s simple offer of salvation through Christ by pairing it with works and ritual. But this way doesn’t work! Only when people follow God’s plan as designed through the sacrificial death of Christ can we attain eternal life.

Key
Question

When have you tried to take shortcuts in life by listening to the advice of other people? How did it usually turn out?

Galatians 1:1-5

THE PEACE THE GOSPEL OFFERS:

Typically, we spend little time reading introductions except to identify the sender. But if we quickly gloss over the greeting here in Galatians, we will miss some very important principles that **Paul** wants the **churches** to grasp. First, he cites the authority by which he writes this letter as **an apostle** called by **God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead** (v. 1). Paul wants them to understand that the words he pens come from the Lord Himself and not mere human tradition or philosophy. For God alone has decreed that salvation comes only through the death and resurrection of His Son and by no other means. If they take issue with the truth of the **gospel**, they have taken issue with God Himself—not Paul. Therefore, Paul wants them to recognize that he hasn't merely espoused his own set of personal beliefs or convictions, but he has delivered the direct mandate of the Lord.

What has led Paul to speak so directly from the very beginning and take such an uncompromising approach? As the letter makes clear, the **churches** in **Galatia** are in danger of following human tradition rather than the Lord (v. 2). To understand how the **churches** got to this point, we must look at history. From AD 47 to 48, Paul traveled throughout Southern Galatia (modern Turkey) where he preached the gospel. This led to an influx of Gentile Christians into the church, leaving some Jewish Christians to question how two groups with such diverse backgrounds could relate. While some Jewish Christians welcomed these new Gentile believers into fellowship with open arms, others demanded that they follow Jewish practices, like circumcision and diet, and participate in Jewish ceremonies to become full-fledged members.

“Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Acts 4:12

To resolve this growing conflict, Paul traveled to Jerusalem where he met with other leaders ([Gal 2:1-10](#)). At that time, the Holy Spirit led these men to affirm that Gentile Christians should not be unduly burdened with rituals, but that a relationship with Christ Jesus alone is sufficient for salvation. Still, some Jewish Christians did not

Instruct

agree with this decision, so they sent delegates to the **churches of Galatia** to persuade them to follow Jewish practices, distorting the only requirement of a relationship with Christ ([Gal 2:11-21](#)). So, in early AD 49, Paul writes this letter to remind them to follow what God has said about salvation and **not** to follow mere **men** and their philosophies (v. 1)! Eventually, the church convened another council in Jerusalem to settle the matter once-and-for-all. Again, they reaffirmed that salvation comes only through Christ—not through mere ritual—and is demonstrated through life-change ([Acts 15:1-29](#)).

In the remainder of the greeting, Paul briefly summarizes the content of the **gospel**. For example, the phrase **grace to you and peace** isn't Paul merely wishing the Galatians well in the way we would write, "I hope this letter finds you well" (v. 3). On the contrary, **grace** reminds us that salvation from God is unmerited—we don't deserve it. Because we chose to rebel and sin against the Lord, we find ourselves in conflict with Him; however, God graciously provided a way that we can be reconciled (i.e., have peace) with Him. Thus, Paul can attest that **our Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from this present evil age** in accordance with God's plan (v. 4).

This rather lengthy greeting sets the stage for the body of the letter where Paul addresses this destructive doctrinal error that had become manifest in the **churches**. Some teachers had convinced the Galatians that salvation consists of Jesus plus observing certain religious rituals. Such teaching, however, corrupts the truth and **distorts** the gospel! The introduction, therefore, serves to remind the Galatians of the sole source of their salvation (Christ) as well as the manner of their salvation (by **grace**). God's **grace** in the sacrificial death of Jesus on the cross and His subsequent bodily resurrection alone makes salvation possible when we repent of our sins and attain **peace** through Him. If we attempt to add anything else to Jesus' all-encompassing sacrifice, we nullify it and render it ineffective. We must follow God's plan for salvation exactly! There is only one way to salvation and that's through the finished work of Christ—not Christ plus ritual, tradition, good works, or anything else!

Question
1

What are some "requirements" that people wrongly try to attach to salvation today?

Galatians 1:6-10

THE PERVERSION OF THE GOSPEL:

Paul begins the body of his letter with a scathing rebuke in which he expresses amazement at how quickly they have abandoned God based on the influence of a counterfeit **gospel**. Because of the way our minds work with language, we often envision the Galatians turning from one **gospel** to another, but Paul makes it clear here that they have turned **away from Him who called them in the grace of Christ** (v. 6). In other words, they have turned from God Himself. To reject the **gospel**, therefore, means they have rejected God and His **grace**. This has grave consequences! At first, Paul describes it as **a different gospel**, but then quickly clarifies that there really **is not another gospel** (v. 7). There is only one **gospel** given by God that can save!

Sometimes in cooking we use items labeled imitation, like bacon bits or crab meat. Although manufacturers may use flavoring and chemicals to make the item look and even taste like the real thing, discerning palettes can tell the difference. These products can never become an actual piece of bacon or crab; it's impossible based on their contents! Imitation bacon bits, for example, have the following ingredients: textured soy flour, canola oil, salt, caramel color, natural and artificial flavor, and much more. The manufacturers include just enough of the real product, in this case "natural flavor" from grease most likely, to fool people into thinking that it tastes like bacon. But in the end, it's not bacon nor can it ever be!



In the same way, **some** attempt to **pervert the gospel of Christ**. They keep just a hint of the truth to fool people into thinking that it's the real thing before adding their own ingredients. But this is **not** the gospel nor can it ever be based upon its contents! Consider this one example of how our world perverts the **gospel**. **Some** will claim that God loves everyone (a true statement), but then they will mix in their own belief that everyone will go to heaven because God loves them (a false statement). To the

Instruct

undiscerning, this statement sounds good. After all, it does have an element of truth which Scripture affirms. But it's not the **gospel**. Only those who have followed God's plan and accepted Christ as their Savior by repenting of their sins can enter heaven.

Question
2

In what ways do some people pervert the gospel today?

Since **some** have attempted to **pervert the gospel**, Paul encourages the Galatians to evaluate the content of the message above the charisma and personality of the speaker—even if they have an intimate relationship with the speaker! Thus, the apostle even includes himself in this advice. They need to examine the content of the message whether it comes from him, anyone on the mission team, or **an angel from heaven** (v. 8)! **If** the content of their preaching conflicts with the **gospel** established by God through Christ, they must reject it altogether—both the message and the messenger. To underscore the importance of rejecting corrupt and counterfeit content parading as the **gospel**, Paul repeats this plea almost verbatim in verse 9.

The Greek translation of the Old Testament frequently uses the word **accursed** to describe the “ban” implemented by God in Deuteronomy 7:1-6 when Israel was poised to conquer the Promised Land. God instructed Israel to annihilate the cultures that dwelt in Canaan, driving them completely from the land and taking none of their possessions as personal spoils of war. If any vestige of these civilizations remained—whether people or possession—it would negatively influence Israel and cause her to turn away from the Lord. As the book of Judges opens, we see the stark result of Israel's failure to drive out these inhabitants; their influence corrupted the people and everyone did what was right in his own eyes rather than follow the Lord ([Judg 17:6](#)).



In Galatians 1:8-9, the messenger has made himself cursed by God because he has perverted the **gospel** and led people astray. Hence, Paul's use of **accursed** has two implications. First, God will certainly judge and punish an individual who corrupts the **gospel**. Second, the church should have nothing at all to do with either such a message or messenger, for it will influence the body negatively and lead people to turn from God. The Galatians have already proven this point by how quickly they turned from God (v. 6)! Although we should attempt to correct that person and reconcile them to Christ ([Gal 6:1](#)), if they refuse to repent of their errant teaching, we should have nothing to do with them ([1 Tim 1:18-20](#)). In his second letter, John also makes this same concession even more clearly: "If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him" ([2 John 1:10](#)).

Question
3

Why is it dangerous not to distance yourself from false teaching and teachers even if you think your faith is strong?

We live in a society in which the social status of a messenger and the packaging of the message—that is the way it's delivered—play a more prominent role than the actual content. Simply because of their perceived achievements, notoriety, and charisma, the message of influencers, celebrities, and athletes carries tremendous weight regardless of how ethical, logical, or truthful the content may be. While some of these individuals may use their platforms to promote values that align with God's Word, most do not. And of those who do not, some of what they say and do may even sound reasonable at times.

But the failure to evaluate the content of a message against the absolute truth of Scripture always leads to peril. It quite literally leads us down a path of destruction by putting us at odds with God! God has given us clear instruction in His Word and a brain to process the wise from the foolish if we would allow Him to guide us. Before the next TikTok challenge compelling people to eat laundry detergent, teach your children to pray to God for wisdom who gives faithfully to those who ask ([Jas 1:5](#)). When it comes to social issues, we ourselves must read Scripture and pray to discern God's instruction rather than following flashy fads promoted by a popular person. Just as Paul urges here, we must evaluate the content of the message above the personality and

Instruct

packaging of the messenger!

In verse 10, Paul defends himself against the charges of the false teachers who have accused him of changing the **gospel** to make it more accommodating to the Gentiles and easier for them to accept by dropping the requirement of the law. This charge prompts Paul to ask, “**For do I now persuade men or God**” (v. 10)? The false teachers have mischaracterized both the **gospel** and Paul’s teaching of it. In a sense, they claim that he has attempted to persuade people to accept Christ by telling them they can continue to live however they want—the law doesn’t matter. At the same time, they claim he has also tried to **persuade** God to accept people regardless of how they live in relation to the law.

Paul rejects the claim entirely. He maintains that he has not tried to convince anyone to accept the **gospel** by using unscrupulous tactics or by making it easier to believe. On the contrary, he has only preached the message that God has given him directly. This line of argument becomes clear when Paul asks, “**Or do I seek to please men?**” If Paul attempted to appease **men**, then he **would not be a servant of Christ**. Thus, Paul’s focus is to **please** God not men, so He has communicated the divine message faithfully!



As the rest of Galatians will demonstrate, God never used the law as a means of salvation ([Gal 3:1-9](#)). It only pointed to the need for salvation by showing how far short of God’s standard we fall ([Gal 3:19-25](#); [Rom 7:13-25](#)). God has always saved through His grace ([Gal 2:11-21](#)). And when people respond to that grace in Christ, it transforms their hearts so that they now desire to reflect God’s holiness in their lives ([Gal 5:16-26](#)).

When we communicate the **gospel**, we should never alter its content or distort its meaning to make it more palatable or acceptable to people. Rather, we must preach and live consistently in accordance with the message that God Himself has spoken to us. Unfortunately, we have many churches today in which people have never actually heard the **gospel**. Instead, they often hear some watered-down, self-help version

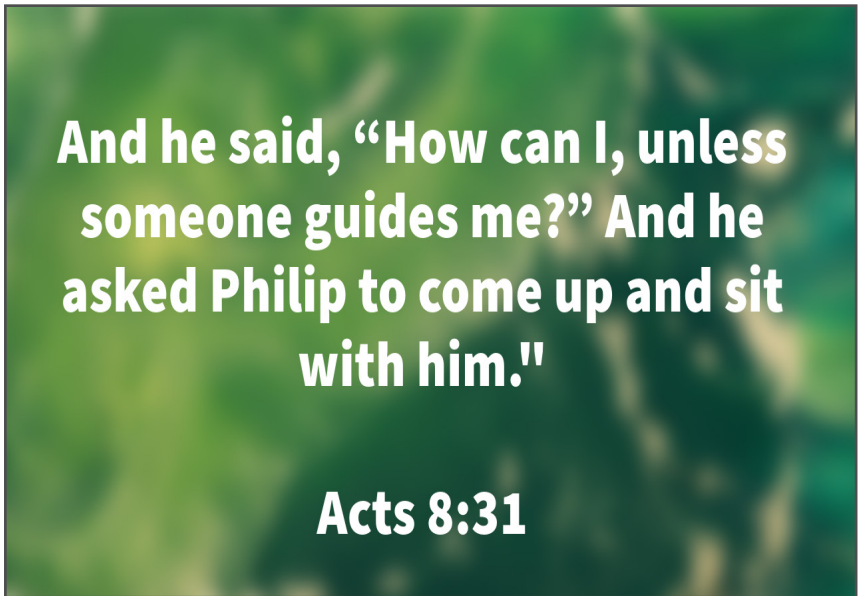
which has no power to save them from their sins. Or they have allowed the culture to change the message of the **gospel** to make it more relevant and acceptable by redefining what constitutes sin instead of allowing the **gospel** to transform people from their sin.

Question
4

In what ways has the culture, and some churches, distorted the message of the gospel to make it more acceptable to people?

Above all else, we must always ensure that the way in which we communicate the **gospel** doesn't change its meaning! We can, however, adapt the way we present it by using different words or illustrations to help people better understand—a process called contextualization. For instance, we would use different words and concepts when communicating the **gospel** with a child than we do with a teenager or adult. Likewise, we would also use different techniques and illustrations in explaining the **gospel** here in the United States than we would in Latin America or Africa. While the manner or method in which we present the **gospel** may change depending upon the audience or culture, its content and principles must always remain the same!

Just as Philip did with the Ethiopian eunuch ([Acts 8:26-40](#)), we must take time to help people understand the **gospel** without changing its meaning or trying to make it easier for them to accept. We can accomplish this by using other clear Scriptures to explain difficult passages, using common language rather than tough theological terms or “churchy”



And he said, “How can I, unless someone guides me?” And he asked Philip to come up and sit with him.”

Acts 8:31

words, and using pertinent illustrations, like Jesus did with parables, to help people connect Scripture with common ideas with which they are familiar.

At the same time, however, we cannot oversimplify the **gospel** so much that it distorts its meaning. To tell people, for example, that they must only “believe” in God unintentionally changes the message! Scripture clearly states that the demons

Instruct

believe in God, but they don't have a relationship with Him ([Jas 2:19](#)). Belief in Jesus is certainly the first step in salvation, but we must also acknowledge (confess) our sinfulness, turn (repent) from it, and surrender our lives wholly to Him. Let us, therefore, both live and preach the **gospel** consistently, ensuring that we accurately communicate its message to a world which desperately needs the transformation it offers.

Question
5

In what ways have you “contextualized” the gospel in order to help someone better understand it?

Galatians 1:11-12

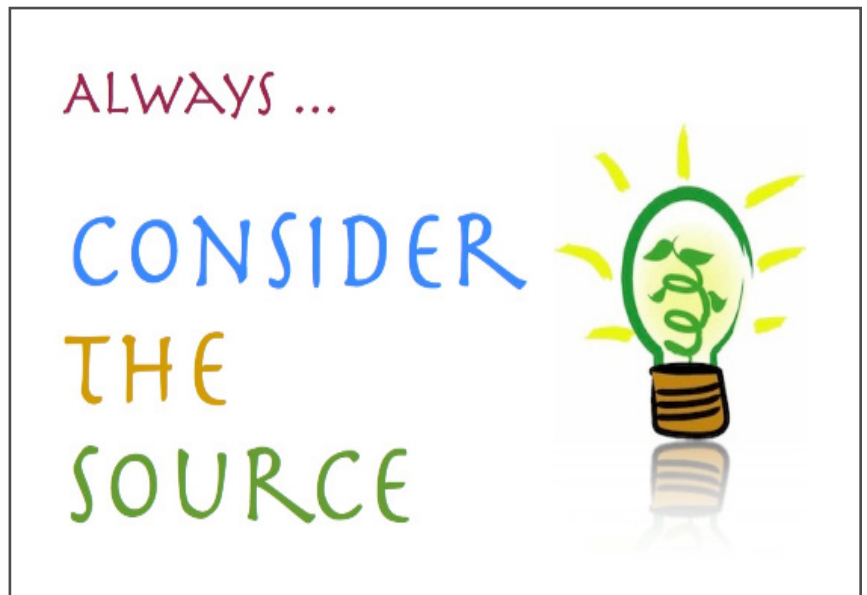
THE PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL NOT TRADITION

Having defended the content and message of **the gospel**, Paul now adamantly discusses its divine origin. As he has maintained throughout this introduction, if people want to dispute the content of the **gospel**, they need to take it up with God because its message comes directly from the Lord Himself. Paul hasn't given them his own mere opinion or some collective wisdom of mankind in pursuit of a better life. On the contrary, he has communicated the very words of God! Therefore, Paul emphasizes that the **gospel** he **preached** to them was **not according to man** (v. 11). Thus, he reiterates that he did not receive **it from man** nor **was taught** by tradition, but it came directly **through the revelation of Jesus Christ** (v. 12).

The source of our belief matters greatly! In life, therefore, we ought to consider the source of our belief. Typically, we use this phrase, consider the source, to describe someone who gets information wrong all the time. Yet, this principle should cause us to stop and think: Should we follow man who has a terrible track record of getting things right or God who has never failed? We would all most likely answer that we should follow the word of the One who never fails. Consequently, it is incumbent upon us to read Scripture to hear the Lord Himself speak to us and to know exactly what He requires. As a result, we must go to the original source itself (Scripture) rather than rely solely on tradition or what others may have told us about it. We take a great risk when we depend on other humans or tradition. Both can err at times whereas the original source never errs nor changes.

Today, we often rely on the advice of an expert in a particular field. We want the

best advice so that we can make an informed decision that has the best results. If we have a particular problem with our body, we would go the foremost medical expert in that area. We wouldn't go to a veterinarian or car mechanic! Perhaps, the veterinarian might have some insight into the problem, but he certainly doesn't have the expertise required to treat it. It only takes one minor mistake to cause a major disaster. Knowing this, we would then go to the one with the least chance of making an error and the highest chance of correcting the problem. Yet, why do so many people do the exact



opposite with the Lord? Rather than immediately go to the One who can correct the problem 100% of the time, they first try everything else. But none of those things ever work! Only when we consistently follow God's plan exactly as He designed can we be guaranteed to have life—and an abundant life at that.

Question
6

What draws people to follow tradition or other people before they follow the Word of the Lord?

Galatians 1:13-17

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL TO TRANSFORM:

Paul concludes this introductory section of his letter with an explanation of how we can assuredly know that the **gospel** he preached is true. We can see its effectiveness through its ability to transform. Only the true **gospel** has such power to transform completely. Paul knows this because it has personally transformed him! As an example, he appeals to his own **former conduct in Judaism** in which he zealously **persecuted the church of God**, seeking to **destroy it** (v. 13). He further notes how that as a Pharisee he had **advanced beyond many** of his peers—having studied under Gamaliel, one of Israel’s most respected teachers ([Acts 22:3](#)). Because of his supposed knowledge in the law and his high degree of achievement, Paul took it upon himself to safeguard **the traditions of the fathers**—even if that meant trying to force followers of Christ to recant their faith through constant pressure and violence (v. 14).

Paul now contrasts how he once lived with what he has now become in Christ. The Galatians can see the difference for themselves. In verses 15-17, the Apostle, therefore, recounts the moment everything changed for him on the road to Damascus. By **His grace**, God revealed His Son that day to let Paul know that he was perilously headed in the wrong direction. Paul realized that his long-held beliefs about God and salvation were misguided because he had listened to mere men rather than God. Now, based on a proper understanding of Scripture, he understands that salvation is by God’s **grace** through our faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross alone. By juxtaposing his former life with his transformed life in Christ, Paul in essence asks the Galatians to ponder which way truly works: following tradition, ritual, and human ideas (his former life) or following Christ who gives life by **grace** (his life now)?

To help illustrate this principle, imagine purchasing two laundry detergents that claim to do the exact same thing. Both boast of their ability to remove every



stain and restore the brightness of the garment's colors if only we would follow the directions on the container explicitly. So, we do. We add the detergent, put in the soiled clothes, and run the cycle on the recommended setting. When the first load finishes, we remove the clothes only to find hints of the stain, barely visible, and the fabric still looking worn and faded. We then perform another test with the other detergent—once again following the directions exactly as written upon the container. Upon inspecting the clothes this time, we find that the spots had completely disappeared and the fabric looked vibrant as if almost brand new. Based on the results, which detergent performed as advertised?

Take a moment to examine your own life. What do the results say about whom or what you have trusted? If we truly follow Christ, we will live consistently according to what His Word teaches. We will not deviate from it. As a result, there will be transformation in our lives to which we can point and others can visibly see as evidence of the gospel's effectiveness. Problems arise, however, when we allow other things (people, our own perspectives and opinions, culture, tradition, etc.) to drown out the voice of the Lord. In order to have a successful and fruitful life, we must explicitly follow what God has stated in His Word. Therefore, let's ensure that what we do, say, and believe reflect what God has actually said in Scripture. When we do, we will see evidence of that belief in the transformed way in which we live.

Question
7

To what can you point in your life specifically as evidence of the gospel's effectiveness?

Too often, we go through life troubleshooting our problems by trial and error. We want a quick and easy solution. But many times we look for that solution in the wrong place just like I did when trying to reset the oil light on my car. We turn to culture first and only when all else fails do we look to the Lord. God has given us a perfect plan, however. It works 100% of the time if only we would commit ourselves to live consistently by it.

Incorporate

In what ways does the gospel produce peace in our lives when we live consistently according to God's plan?

How can tradition remind us what the Lord has done for us? When does it become a distraction or hindrance? What steps can we take to prevent it from becoming a distraction?

How can we determine if a "message" truly comes from God? Why is it so difficult for some people to determine whether or not a "message" comes from Him?

April 14, 2024



Live Cooperatively

Galatians 2:1-10

Focal Verse:

““For He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles.”

Galatians 2:8

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Introduce

Rarely do we see complete unity in our world. Perhaps, we have seen glimpses of such unity during times of national crises like World War 2, after the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor, or national tragedies, such as 9/11 when terrorists assaulted the very symbols of our freedom, killing many. We may also see it on the micro-level during natural disasters where people strive to rescue the endangered and resolve to rebuild their communities together. But even then, some people still refuse to cooperate, selfishly seeking the things which benefit themselves—from price gouging to looting. Man has engrained within him a fierce spirit of independence often dominated by self-centeredness whereby he wants things done his way to his own benefit, thus often refusing to cooperate with others.

Too often, this spirit of independence tainted with nearsightedness infiltrates the church. Rather than producing cooperation, it frequently foments division in which people want things done their way.

Consequently, they lose sight of the bigger picture concerning the mission which God has set before them. God has designed us to function as a community—a body—not mere individuals doing our own things randomly as we see fit. Therefore, He's tasked the local church to cooperate with other churches of like-mind and sound doctrine (the key prerequisites) to advance the gospel around the world.

As a local church, for example, we participate in the Cooperative Program (henceforth CP) of The Southern Baptist Convention (henceforth SBC). In doing so, we put aside some of our own pressing needs and preferred methods to join with others collectively to fulfill our scriptural mandate to take the gospel into all the world. The CP provides resources and support for missions (local and international), ministry, and education (seminaries). Although the SBC has a long history of partnership among its churches, the CP actually began in 1919 as a campaign to raise \$75 million to fund the propagation of the gospel throughout the US and the world. The campaign to raise this staggering amount of money adopted the slogan: "We Can Do More Together."



Introduce

Our church generously supports missions throughout the world both by giving to the CP and funding independent missionaries. Although independent missionaries are called by God and do tremendous work, take a moment to think about the advantages of participating in missions cooperatively. First, the missionaries in a network like the International Mission Board do not have to take time away from sharing the gospel to embark on fundraising campaigns. Sometimes well-meaning missionaries spend more time on fundraising for their work than they do on actually sharing the gospel.

Second, cooperation provides a larger network of human resources from which to recruit volunteers who can partner with missionaries on the ground. In addition to the volunteers, it also substantially increases the prayer network which uplifts and encourages missionaries through focused prayer. Finally, cooperation with other churches cultivates accountability, helping us all—both missionary and church—to remain collectively focused on the Great Commission ([Matt 28:19-20](#)).

As we will learn over the next two weeks in our studies, division had arisen among the churches in Galatia between Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians over key components of the gospel to the extent that even Peter had stopped fellowshiping with Gentile believers. When such a key figure broke fellowship, others followed suit. All the while, an assault on the advance of the gospel had begun to occur in which some tried to institute their own doctrinal preferences. As a result, some in the churches went astray, abandoning their God-given mission and succumbing to corrupt teaching.

Therefore, Paul urges the churches to come together for a common cause—to cooperate in defense of the gospel. He wanted the churches to see the bigger picture—salvation by faith in Christ alone. A defense of this tenet should be their primary focus. And proclaiming it to the world so that they might hear the truth of salvation in Christ should become one of their primary purposes. Ultimately, it becomes easier to disseminate the gospel and battle the advance of false doctrine when we band together, keeping each other focused on the truth of God's Word rather than our personal preferences and perspectives.

Key
Question

In what ways has God called us to cooperate or partner with others?

Galatians 2:1-2

THE NEED FOR COMMUNICATION:

In Galatians chapters 1 and 2, Paul gives us a broad chronological timetable of the events that have led him to pen this letter in haste as he urgently battles doctrinal errors destroying fellowship in the church. After his initial call and conversion on the road to Damascus, he spent three years in Arabia before returning to the city of Damascus in preparation for his God-given ministry among the Gentiles ([Gal 1:15-17](#)). After these three years, however, he traveled to **Jerusalem** for the first time to meet with Peter and James, Jesus’ half-brother. He wanted these leaders to see first-hand the radical change that God had wrought in his life because they had only heard his testimony second-hand at this point and some of the Jewish Christians there still seemed skeptical—even fearful—of his motives. Nonetheless, this first visit allayed any fears that anyone might have had and “they glorified” the work God had done in him ([Gal 1:18-24](#)).

Fourteen years later, Paul has now journeyed to **Jerusalem** a second time with an even more important agenda—to defend the integrity of **the gospel** ([Gal 2:1](#)). This time he took **Barnabas**, who had partnered with him on his first missionary journey among the Gentiles in Galatia, and **Titus**, a Gentile convert—the fruit of their preaching **the gospel** so to speak. Just as God had specifically communicated with Paul the content of His message, so now He also directed the Apostle to go to **Jerusalem by revelation** (v. 2). In other words, Paul had traveled there under divine direction and inspiration—not man’s invitation. This demonstrates two things to the Galatians: 1) God had orchestrated the whole process from the beginning to this point and 2) the leaders in the **Jerusalem** church had no problem with **the gospel** he preached **among the Gentiles**. Hence, God sent Paul to **Jerusalem**; the leaders hadn’t summoned him to give an account of his message or method.

During this second trip to



Jerusalem, Paul met **privately** with the revered leaders of the church (i.e., **those who were of reputation**) to discuss the content of the message he preached. Just as he had done with the testimony of his changed life in Christ **fourteen years** earlier, Paul now wanted them to hear **the gospel** he had preached first-hand so that they could judge for themselves its validity. He wanted them to hear from his own lips that it was consistent with the message that they themselves had received from Jesus. With the influx of Gentile Christians into the church as a result of Paul's mission in Galatia, questions had begun to arise about the responsibility and the relationship of these new converts to the Law (Old Testament). So, at God's direction, Paul acted proactively to thwart any misconception or division in the church.

It wasn't as if Paul submitted **the gospel** he preached for approval by these renowned leaders, however. Rather, he wanted to reaffirm that they could minister together because God had endowed them both with the same message and same purpose—**to preach** salvation through Christ alone. So, in what sense **might** Paul have **run in vain** if the leadership can't agree? The unity of the church would suffer severely. God hadn't given two gospels: one for the Jew and another for the Gentile. God hadn't created two churches: one for the Jew and another for the Gentile. On the contrary, God has united His people into one body through Christ ([see Eph 4:1-6](#)). As a church, we must certainly safeguard the content of **the gospel** to ensure it reflects what God has said in Scripture. But we can't allow personal preferences or differences in opinions to distract from the call to **preach**. Therefore, we must focus on the main thing: preaching Christ according to the Scriptures!

Question
1

What are some things that have the potential to distract from the gospel in the church?

From God's directive to Paul in these verses, we can identify two important principles that we should apply in our own day. Before we can partner with someone or some organization in ministry, we must know what they believe and teach about **the gospel**. Their preaching and teaching must square with the revelation God has given us in the Bible. We should never align ourselves with others who have distorted or corrupted the main tenets of **the gospel**. Differences in methods and practices, as long as they are consistent with Scripture, do not negate fellowship or partnership.

However, differences in belief and practices that clearly contradict God’s Word do. We should never just join ourselves with others for the sake of “unity” unless they faithfully handle the Word of God.

Second, we should discuss matters like this **privately** with people who display godly wisdom and maturity. Sometimes we need additional discerning eyes to help us determine if an individual or church has the right content, philosophy, and focus of ministry. Carrying on a discussion like this in



a large, public setting has the potential to go awry because it can quickly become opinion-driven. People have the tendency to align themselves more easily with things that sound good or fit their personal preferences than to evaluate them according to God’s Word. As we shall see in the following verses, this becomes a problem for Paul when some stealthily crash this meeting with the leadership.

Question
2

What are the main things on which we **MUST** agree before we can partner with someone

Although we cannot address every situation or organization, I want to give you some blunt examples. For instance, we cannot partner with the Church of Christ—not because they traditionally don’t use musical instruments in their services—but because they generally believe baptism is a requirement for salvation and one can lose his or her salvation. Both beliefs contradict Scripture! In the same way, we cannot partner with Catholics or Catholic organizations for many reasons, but primarily because they believe in salvation by works and penance (or repentance) through the church. We must exercise great caution today because many churches and organizations have ambiguous names and no clear denominational ties, so it becomes more difficult to know what they truly believe and practice. Therefore, we must find and read their statement of faith to determine if it matches Scripture. And we also need to speak with the leadership and membership privately to know what they actually believe and

practice before we can join hands in ministry.

Galatians 2:3-5

THE SOURCE OF CONFLICT:

The primary source of conflict that arose out of this meeting centered around the practice of circumcision ([Gen 17](#)) which some people made a requirement for salvation. In other words, they contended that to have eternal life one must also **be circumcised** in addition to believing in Christ. This parallels the modern-day practice of the Church of Christ with respect to baptism mentioned in the previous paragraph. In order to have eternal life, they claim one must be baptized. As we learned last week, however, salvation depends upon Christ alone. In order to have eternal life, we must believe in Him, confess our sins, repent, and submit to Him. Nothing else is required! For this reason, Paul appeals to **Titus** as an example. None of the revered leaders in attendance at that meeting **compelled Titus** as a **Greek to be circumcised**.

Circumcision, and baptism for that matter, function only as an outward sign of the covenant with God. Abraham did not enter into a relationship with the Lord because of his circumcision; he already had a relationship with the Lord because he had obediently responded when God called ([Gen 15:6](#)). Circumcision, therefore, only served to remind Abraham and his descendants of God's grace as well as their responsibility to follow and serve Him alone. Paul will spend the rest of his letter to the Galatians detailing this very principle. Likewise, baptism functions in the same way. We are not saved because we have been baptized; rather, baptism serves to remind us of the new life which Christ has called us to live in Him ([Rom 6:1-14](#)).

In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

Colossians 2:11-12

The church leaders who had first-hand knowledge of Jesus' teaching as His disciples (namely, Peter and John) or earthly family members (James) had no qualms about **the gospel** Paul preached (see v. 9). Because they had intimate knowledge of what Jesus taught, these individuals would have easily spotted any errors or problems

with Paul's message had there been any. The dispute concerning circumcision began, however, only when **false brethren** infiltrated the meeting with these respected leaders. Rather than coming to the meeting with pure motives, these individuals sought to impose their own personal beliefs and interpretations upon the church. By pretending to be both believers and leaders, they hoped to influence the church to adopt their errant view, thereby gaining a following for themselves.

In His teaching, Jesus even warned His disciples about such people as this who would seek to infiltrate the church and lead them astray. He calls them wolves in sheep's clothing ([Matt 7:15](#)). So, He urged the disciples to examine these false teachers' messages carefully by noting how they lived morally and by seeing what type of fruit their teaching produced ([Matt 7:16, 20](#)). Do they both match the truth of Scripture? We will recognize these false teachers by the corrupt fruit their ministries bear. Therefore, people who perpetuate such false teaching should be removed from the church so that they cannot continue to corrupt it ([Matt 7:19](#)).

Paul follows Jesus' example in dealing swiftly and harshly with people masquerading as "believers." He doesn't mince his words, but bluntly calls them what they are: **false brethren**. Remember from our study of Galatians 1:6-7 that Paul has already noted that to reject **the gospel** is to reject God Himself. These **false brethren** do not have a relationship with the Lord or else they would have had a proper understanding of **the gospel**. Thus, to deviate from **the gospel** in any way signifies complete rejection of the Lord. For this reason, the Apostle definitively reveals that the true leaders (i.e., **we**) at this meeting **did not** submit **even for one hour**, so **that the truth of the gospel might continue with** them (v. 5). In modern terms, Paul asserts that the leaders didn't pay attention to what these **false brethren** said. They didn't even give it a second thought—and neither should the Galatians so that **the truth** might continue to spread unimpeded.

I marvel that you are turning away so soon from Him who called you in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel, which is not another; but there are some who trouble you and want to pervert the gospel of Christ.

Galatians 1:6-7

We live in a world which has very little understanding of what it means to be a “Christian” or “believer.” They lump all kinds of people together and label them as “Christian” when, in fact, they do not truly have a relationship with Christ at all. For example, Mormons and Jehovah’s Witnesses are not Christian; they’re cults because they deny the deity of Christ. Moreover, any denomination that identifies as “Christian” or even evangelical for that matter, but does not preach **the gospel** as recorded in Scripture, should be distinguished as **false brethren**. We cannot pervert **the gospel** or change it in any way from what God has established in the Bible and call ourselves Christian. Although this may sound harsh, this is what Scripture teaches!

Question # 3

How can the ways that the world uses to identify a “Christian” actually hinder the understanding of the gospel?

We shouldn’t treat such people who have a misunderstanding of **the gospel** with hostility, and antagonism or condemn them with an air of superiority. At the same time, however, neither should we mislead them into thinking that they have a relationship with Christ when they truly don’t. We must show them their error (Matt 18:15) and speak **the truth** in love ([Eph 4:15](#)), allowing the Holy Spirit to convict and lead them to repentance in Christ. We can’t do this if we remain silent. We can’t do this if we merely accept the fact that they attend a mainline “church” or denomination with ties to Christianity, leading them to believe that Baptists, Methodists, Catholics, or whatever group with which they identify is Christian and they will have eternal life no matter what they believe about the method of salvation. We must speak up!

Yet, this doesn’t mean that people in these churches or denominations cannot have a personal relationship with Christ. On the contrary, it is only meant to show that what they believe and how they practice **the gospel** matter greatly. Only through a personal relationship with Christ, not works, not ritual (baptism), not birth (i.e., being born into a Christian home), and not simply by default (i.e., not being Muslim, Jewish, or another religion) can we be assured of eternal life. Any denomination, church, or person who does not preach **the gospel** as defined clearly in Scripture is **false**—not Christian. What we believe about Jesus and how we respond to the salvation He offers in Him will determine where we spend eternity! What we believe matters greatly!

Galatians 2:6-10

THE COMMITMENT TO MINISTRY:

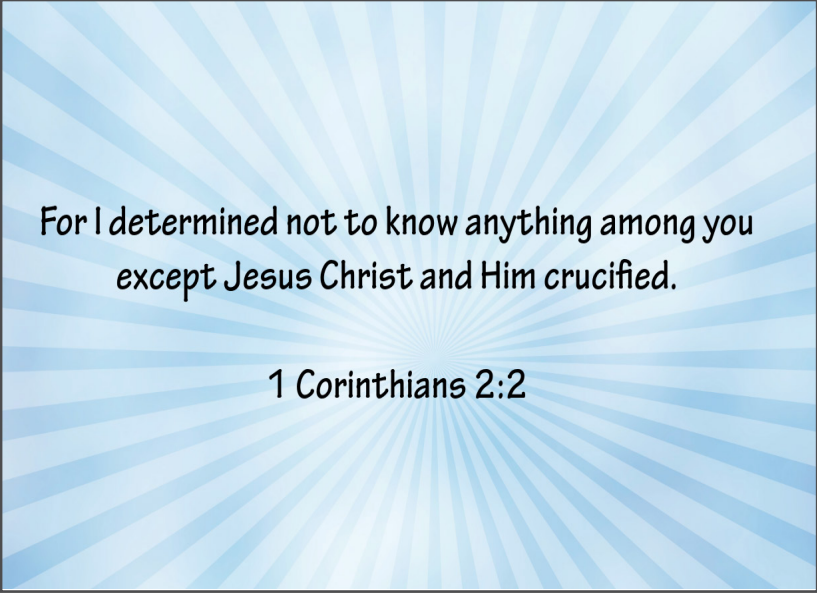
Even though God may have called us to different areas of service and to reach different people or people groups, we all still have the same purpose and must still communicate **the** same **gospel**. Regardless of how vastly different our areas of ministry, mission, and service might look, we can, and should, work together to glorify God by accomplishing His will through the faithful proclamation of His **gospel**. As Paul closes this section of his letter, he challenges every believer to commit to ministering together as God's people for the purpose of reaching people from every socio-economic background and race with **the gospel**.

Paul begins this last section by reminding the Galatian churches of the importance of **the gospel** message above the messenger (see Gal 1:7-8). In verse 6, he returns to discuss the results of

the private meeting with the leadership of the Jerusalem church with which this chapter began. This time, however, he refers to the leadership as **those who seemed to be something** instead of **those who were of reputation** and he stresses that they **added nothing to me**. In other words, Paul wishes to convey that these renowned leaders

didn't add any requirements to **the gospel** he preached. In fact, they all agreed that salvation by faith in Christ crucified and resurrected was sufficient.

The way Paul's words in verse 6 translate into English (i.e., **seemed to be something**) can give the wrong impression that he was downplaying or even mocking the importance of the leadership in Jerusalem. Paul, however, does not have that motivation when he penned these words. On the contrary, he merely wants to emphasize that he, like God, doesn't focus on the personality of the preacher, but rather he focuses on the purity of their message—that is how accurately they handle God's Word and how faithfully they communicate it. The perceived stature or status of any leader in the church should never supersede doctrinally sound preaching.



For I determined not to know anything among you
except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

1 Corinthians 2:2

Instruct

It doesn't matter if they physically walked with Jesus as His disciples or were part of his earthly family (i.e., **whatever they were**). God does not show **personal favoritism** to anyone! Instead, He holds everyone accountable for what they do with **the gospel** and how they communicate it. Thus, through these words, Paul compels the Galatians to listen to the soundness of the message rather than simply look at the prestige of the messenger.

Question
4

How faithfully do you communicate the gospel?
When was the last time that you shared the gospel with someone?

To illustrate Paul's point, think about how people tend to follow a well-known "Christian" author or, perhaps, even a favorite personality on television or online. Too often, they hang on every word of these personalities and consume every part of their teaching without critically evaluating it according to the principles of Scripture. They accept what these people say solely based on their perceived status and popular appeal in the world. Paul, however, urges us to be careful not to engage in this practice. Even if these leaders seemingly have a good pedigree and track record, we must still evaluate everything according to Scripture. The content of the message is always more important than the qualifications of the one who delivers it. God can use the highly educated and the uneducated alike! One's training, one's affiliation, and one's background don't always guarantee they will faithfully transmit God's Word. Whether they handle and preach the truth correctly according to Scripture matters most.

Question
5

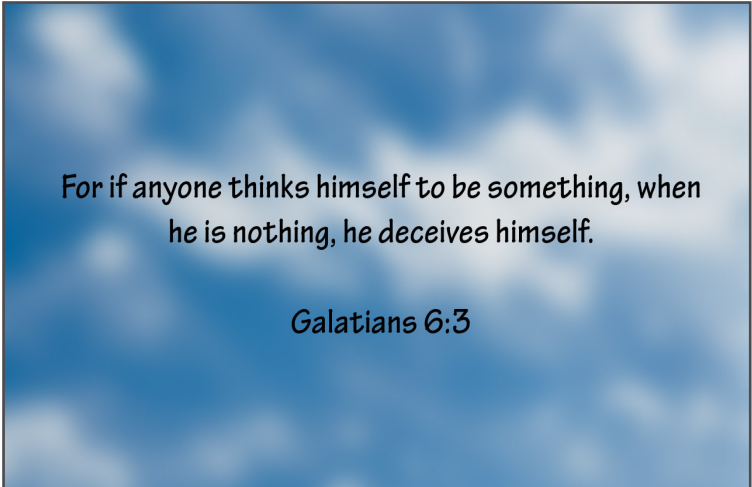
What is the danger of reading devotionals or listening to messages or podcasts online without first reading Scripture?

While we shouldn't go around with a critical spirit ([Gal 6:3](#)) or constantly seek to challenge the leadership that God has put in place to help facilitate ministry in the church, we must hold one another accountable—staff and member alike—to preach correct doctrine and to apply it in our lives. I want to be clear because, like the world, the church sometimes confuses items of personal preference and opinion with matters of doctrinal truth which should never be compromised. People want things their way.

God, however, has called the church in unity to disseminate **the gospel** not to cater to the whims of individuals' personal preference. Leadership helps the church to remain on the same page and move in the same direction. While the methods at times may change—and we may prefer a different method personally—the message always remains the same!

Style of worship, the way we conduct Bible study or small groups, the way we do outreach and missions

in some ways align more with matters of preference. God has put leadership in place to help us navigate these differences and focus on the main thing: **the gospel**. Therefore, we should not be critical of the methods and practices of the church as long as they adhere to Scripture. Nor should we seek to get the church to bend to our personal preferences as if it serves us. If the church preaches the truth and is faithful to Scripture, then we need to find our place of service and help the church fulfill its God-given mandate to reach the world with the methods leadership has put into place. If the church, however, doesn't teach the Word of God faithfully or it adopts clearly unbiblical practices, then we should speak up in love and point to Scripture definitively in a call to transform. If the church still refuses to repent of such wayward doctrine or practices, then we should ask the Lord to help us find a church that follows the principles of Scripture faithfully so that we can continue to serve as He called us.



For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Galatians 6:3

Question
6

What are the key tenets of our faith to which we must all adhere and there can be no compromise whatsoever?

Throughout the remaining verses, Paul reaffirms that these two widely diverse groups can minister together because they preach exactly **the same gospel**. For this reason, these leaders in the meeting **added nothing** to the message because they recognized they both preached the same thing! In verse 7, Paul therefore points out that these leaders realized that God had called Paul to take **the gospel** to the Gentiles (i.e., **uncircumcised**) just as He had called Peter to take it to the Jews (i.e., **circumcised**).

Instruct

They could draw this conclusion because they could see the evidence of the gospel's effectiveness in the changed lives of those who accepted it! Both Peter and Paul can testify first-hand because they witnessed how God **worked effectively** first in their own lives and then in the lives of the others to whom He had called them to preach (v. 8)!

How do we evaluate something's effectiveness, especially if we cannot see it visibly? Consider gardeners who use pesticides. With the exception of a few powders, most sprays are invisible. Yet, we can be confident in our assessment of their effectiveness by looking at the results. Insects won't consume the plants or damage the crops with an "effective" pesticide applied. On the other hand, if the pesticide did not work

effectively, evidence of insect damage would also be evident. Similarly, we can determine the effectiveness of **the gospel** by examining the results. People who have truly responded will act and think differently. We can see the change in their behavior—whether Gentile or Jew. Although this change will sometimes take place gradually over time, we still see evidence of maturation in Christ during a person's life. Since Paul and Peter preach **the same gospel**, they see the same evidence of God's effective working in the lives of the people to whom they minister—which we will examine more closely in our lesson next week.



Because they preached **the same gospel** and could see the fruit that God had borne through their respective ministries, Paul concludes that they can partner together. When the leaders recognized **the grace** that God had given Paul to minister to the Gentiles just as He had them among the Jews, they extended **the right hand of fellowship** to him and his team (v. 9). In fact, they even shared the same desire to minister to **the poor** (v. 10). Just as the early church did, we need to live cooperatively with fellow Christians who preach **the gospel** faithfully and practice the principles found in Scripture. We are not in competition with other

churches of like-mind and sound doctrine nor are we at competition in our own local body to have our voices heard and personal preferences adopted. Although God has gifted us differently for various areas of service and called us to reach different people, He has still called us in unity for the same purpose, to achieve the same goal, and to have the same focus: **the gospel** of Christ Jesus. Let us, therefore, work cooperatively to reach people for the Lord and see how God will work through us to grow His kingdom!

Question
7

In what ways does competition sometimes exist in the church or among churches? How does this sometimes hinder the spread of the gospel?

Inspire

As Southern Baptists, we have a network with whom we can partner to take the gospel around the world. This partnership, however, doesn't negate personal responsibility in the local church (FBCFW). Each one of us has been tasked by God to take the gospel into all the world wherever we go. This means that we should communicate it in our homes, our neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools, places of recreation, and in the marketplace. Preaching the gospel isn't merely the job of an organization or even the pastoral staff. It's the assignment God has given each of you as a vital member of this body! Join together with every member of this body to impact the world with the gospel. Don't make excuses! Don't see yourselves as too busy or unequipped! Be involved! Live cooperatively so that we can see God's effective working through us here at FBCFW.

Incorporate

As a church, how do we need to work cooperatively to preach the gospel? What is your part?

Why must we as a church and individual be very careful about partnering with other organizations or individuals, even if they claim to be “Christian” or have “Christian” values?

What criteria should you use to evaluate whether you can partner with an organization or individual to do missions or “social” ministry? Why must the gospel be the center of every ministry—especially “social” ministries such as helping the poor?

Journal: Document God's Work

April 21, 2024



Live as Christ

Galatians 2:11-21

Focal Verse:

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

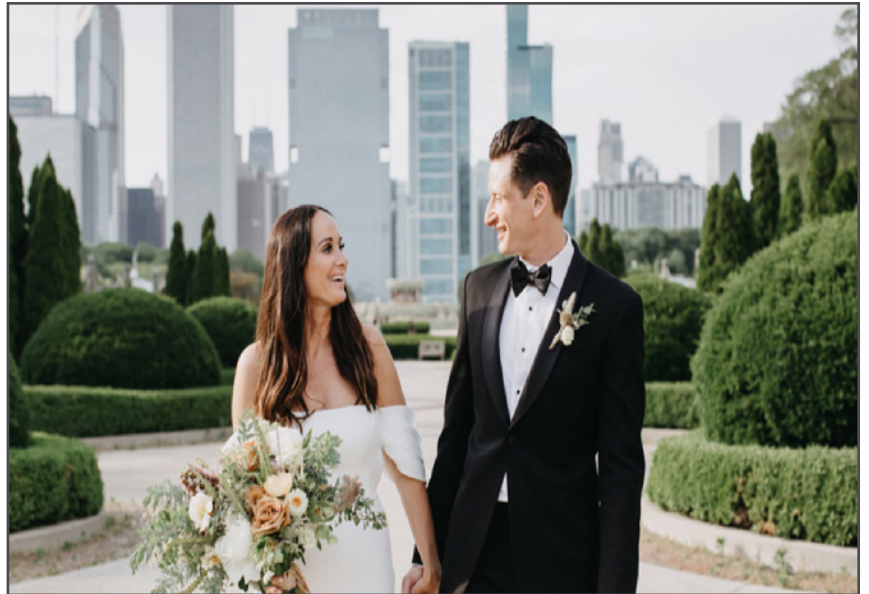
Galatians 2:20

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The Bible often describes our relationship with the Lord in terms of marriage. The Old Testament portrays God as Israel's gracious and loving husband ([Isa 54:5](#)). At times, however, Israel acts more like an unfaithful, adulterous wife ([Jer 23:10](#); [Ezek 16:1-63](#); [Hosea](#)). Sometimes the people stray off course so that their actions warrant a "divorce"—or period of exile under foreign rule—from the Lord who loves them above any other and wants to redeem them ([Isa 50:1](#)). In the New Testament, the church is also identified as the "bride" of Christ who submits herself to the Lord who unconditionally gave Himself up for her on the cross in the greatest expression of love known to mankind ([Eph 5:22-33](#)). Using the concept of marriage as an illustration will also help us better understand the conflict and its resolution here in Galatians chapter 2.

Marriage begins a whole new phase of life. No longer can we live as we once did. And truthfully, if we love our spouses, we will no longer want to live



that way! As a result, marriage requires a completely different way of thinking. That new way of thinking will, or at least should, determine how we act! First, we must forsake all others; our spouse must become our priority in life after Christ. Not only must we remain faithful and pure ([Exod 20:14](#); [Matt 5:28](#)), but we must also learn to depend upon one another in life. Leaving our father and mother ([Gen 2:24](#); [Matt 19:5](#)), we must now walk through life together, celebrating the good times and navigating the difficult ones. Consequently, we must learn to seek the Lord and communicate with each other to work out things together.

Second, and equally as important, a spouse can no longer think individualistically. We can no longer live as a single person concerned only with our own affairs. On the contrary, we must now think collectively. We must temper and put aside our own preferences and desires to think of the things that benefit our new status as a couple. This doesn't mean, however, that we will alter our personalities and unique giftedness, but rather that we will constantly consider the needs of the other and seek to do

Introduce

what is best for us collectively as one body. Therefore, if we truly function in the way Scripture teaches, we will have the same desire and purpose because we have become one flesh in Christ.

Although Galatians 2 does not mention marriage, these same two principles apply in our relationship with Christ. Our relationship requires a new way of thinking and living. No longer can we live in the way we once did. Paul asserts, “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” ([Gal 2:20](#)). Just as in marriage, we must forsake everyone and everything else, when it comes to our relationship with Christ; He must become the priority in our lives ([Matt 19:29](#); [Mark 10:28](#)). We must communicate with Him daily and depend upon Him for everything; He will then walk hand-in-hand with us through life.

Moreover, we must no longer think according to the flesh, or selfishly, but rather we should think collectively in terms of doing things that will glorify Him and edify His body, the church, as a whole. When we do, His desires will become our desires and we will seek collectively to do His will. As a result, we will use our distinctive personalities and unique giftedness to serve Him in the church and disseminate the gospel faithfully, putting aside our personal preferences and goals to focus collectively on serving Him through the transformed way in which we now live.

Key
Question

In what ways has Christ transformed the way you think and live?

Galatians 2:11-13

THE CONFRONTATION OF HYPOCRISY:

As we learned last week, leaders in the early church wholeheartedly agreed that we are saved from our sins through a relationship with Jesus and nothing else. This meant salvation isn't based upon Christ plus circumcision, participating in religious rituals, following the requirements of the law, or anything else. Thus, all believers—both Jew and Gentile—could freely fellowship together as one body provided that they had a genuine relationship with Christ Jesus. But **now**, something had changed. Some of the key leadership from the church in Jerusalem had reverted to their old way of thinking. They had begun to separate themselves from Gentile Christians, refusing to worship together. So, Paul must address this fledgling movement because it had begun to influence Jewish Christians in other churches, especially **Antioch** and Galatia (v. 11).

In verse 11, we find Peter (i.e., **Cephas**) as the main culprit. As one of the twelve disciples who learned directly from Jesus, both Peter's teaching and actions carried tremendous weight in the early church. And Jesus had specifically tasked Peter with shepherding and safeguarding ministry in the church ([John 21:15-17](#)). Therefore, he had the ability to influence the direction of the people greatly—whether positively or negatively. In this case, he had begun to influence them in a negative way, creating unnecessary division among its membership. **Before certain men came from James** in Jerusalem, Peter **would** fellowship **with the Gentiles** (v. 12). After **they came**, he then began to withdraw and separate **himself** from Gentile Christians because he feared those advocating that the Gentiles must be circumcised to become full members of the church.

We can begin to see the scope of the problem when we properly understand what Paul means by **eat** in this verse. In our Western mindset, we tend to take this literally and envision a group of people seated around a table



enjoying a sumptuous meal together. Thus, we would see the main problem as the difference in dietary restrictions between Jew and Gentile. Jewish Christians would separate themselves from eating with Gentile Christians rather than risk being served something un-kosher, like pork. Dietary restrictions, however, actually had little to do with the real reason why the Jewish Christians began separating themselves. It was a much more serious division in the church that had arisen which threatened its very foundation.

In the early church, eating—whether the Lord’s Supper or simply a meal—was part of the larger context of worship. In Acts 2:42, we find a description of a typical gathering where “they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.” By understanding eating as one of the core components of worship, we arrive at the true source of the conflict. The Jewish Christians just didn’t refuse to **eat** with Gentile Christians; they refused to worship with them and thereby excluded them from the redeemed body of Christ! They excluded them from worship and fellowship (i.e., participation) because they viewed the Gentile Christians as unclean and fundamentally flawed—not solely on the basis of their diet, but because of their status or position outside of the “people of God” (see also Eph 2:11-22). As a result, this Jewish contingent, which had influenced Peter and other key leaders, sought to remedy the problem—not by salvation in Christ—but by requiring the Gentiles to become “Jewish” by practicing all the components of the law.

Question # 1

How can the way we view people affect the way that we relate to them or respond to them with the gospel?

Such a view created devastating division in the church. Jewish believers treated Gentile believers as second-class citizens while viewing themselves as favored by the Lord. If anyone should have recognized the fallacy in this thinking, however, it should have been Peter! God had to correct Peter’s own understanding of this very principle when sending him with the gospel to a Roman centurion in Caesarea by the name of Cornelius (Acts 10). Through a vision of a sheet with many “unclean” animals, God commanded Peter to kill and eat. When Peter objected, God reminded His servant not to call the things which He had made clean unclean (Acts 10:15). At God’s direction, Peter then went faithfully to Cornelius’ home to preach the gospel and the whole

household came to faith in Christ. But when Peter returned to Judea, his mission to the Gentiles had created an uproar.

Yet, Peter rose to meet the challenge posed by replying, “If God therefore gave them the same gift as He gave us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I could withstand Christ” (Acts 11:17)?

Peter had seen God work first-hand. God had made no distinction between the Jews and Gentiles on the basis of anything purely physical. Furthermore, God didn’t view the Gentiles as a second-class part of His creation. On the contrary, He recognized that both Jews and Gentiles were fundamentally flawed by sin and needed a Savior to rescue them. That day in Caesarea, Peter saw God demonstrate the same love that He had demonstrated to him and the Jews by reconciling them all together through Christ without distinction! Like Peter, this should lead us to ask, “If God doesn’t make a distinction, then why do we?” Therefore, we must live together as one body for one purpose: to glorify the One who has saved us.

“But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we [Jews] shall be saved in the same manner as they [Gentiles].”

Acts 15:11

Question # 2 What differences among people sometimes cause divisions within the church?

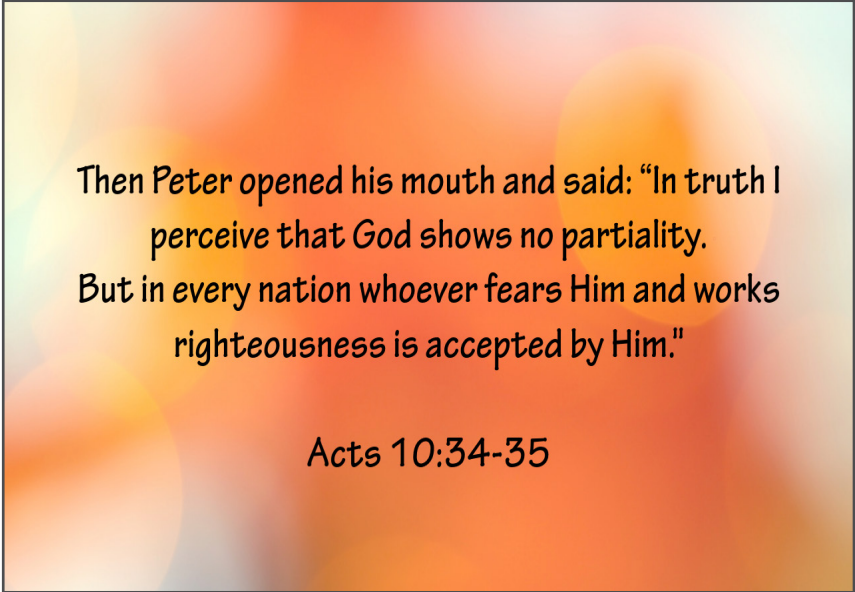
The fact that Peter had seen God’s work first-hand among the Gentiles makes his joining in this separation much worse. Even though he knew better, he still strayed from the truth and compromised the gospel! In verse 12, Paul cites the reason for Peter’s change of heart as **fearing those who were of the circumcision**. Yet, what did Peter have to fear? Based upon the context, the word translated **fearing** can also mean to reverence or show respect. If we apply that understanding here, we can learn what Peter feared. He wanted to please the **men from James** rather than risk encountering opposition or hindering his mission to the Jewish people. In this way, Peter feared more about what other people might think and how they might react than the integrity of the gospel and the unity of the church. He valued people’s perception above God’s perspective of the world!

In some ways, this same type of thinking governs some people in the church today. We want to please people, fearing what they may think or how they might react. We don't want to stand out from the rest of our culture or even various groups in the church, so we try to blend seamlessly. While culture might not always influence the way one behaves, remaining silent and not speaking against clearly unbiblical practices does just as much damage as the people who engage in them. We sometimes bow to peer pressure because we fear being ostracized from the group. When we try to appease the culture either by giving in to its demands or failing to speak against unbiblical practices, we compromise the gospel of Christ. Acquiescing the culture doesn't lead to unity nor does it show love; it always leads to dysfunction because it distorts God's plan!

Because Peter knew better than to disassociate with Gentile

Christians, Paul confronts him directly. After **Peter had come to Antioch**, Paul opposed **him to his face because** he shouldered **the blame**. Not only does the phrase **withstood him to his face** mean "in person," but it also shows how frankly and even forcefully Paul spoke to Peter about this issue. In our modern language, we would say that Paul "got in his face." Paul, however, didn't speak out of anger, but rather concern **because** Peter was leading people astray! Therefore, the tone of the confrontation depicts one of firmness and resolve not to compromise and tarnish the true message of the gospel. In other words, Paul didn't beat around the bush, but spoke bluntly with Peter about his mistake.

Furthermore, Peter's position in the early church made his error even more dangerous because people followed his example. Paul notes that **the rest of the Jews**, including his trusted co-worker **Barnabas, played the hypocrite with him** (v. 13). The word translated **hypocrite** and **hypocrisy** comes from the Greek theater where it refers to an "actor" playing a role. Paul, therefore, has charged Peter and those who followed his example with pretending to be something they're not! They had begun to see



Then Peter opened his mouth and said: "In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him."

Acts 10:34-35

themselves as distinct from and even superior to Gentile Christians. Yet, God had already shown them that no such distinction existed: both groups have sinned, both needed a Savior, and both could only have eternal life through Christ. Peter and the other first-century Jews who followed him had seen this first-hand when God saved the Gentiles in the same way that He had saved them! Now, however, they had forgotten and once again separated themselves.

From this confrontation over Peter's errant view, we can learn two things. First, we must remember how God saved us by grace through Christ Jesus and understand where we'd be without Him. Focusing on perceived differences or seeing ourselves as better than others prevents us from truly ministering as He has called us. God has called us to partner together as believers in His church to reach all people with the gospel. As long as customs and cultural practices don't conflict with Scripture, we must put aside our differences in order to minister together lest we miss divinely appointed opportunities to unite as God's people to fulfill the Great Commission ([Matt 28:19-20](#)).



Although somewhat different from the circumstances Paul addressed here in Galatians, an example of a missionary to the Maasai people of East Africa will help us understand the importance of looking beyond our differences to see the similarities we have in Christ. As perhaps one of the last remaining tribes which fiercely held onto their ancestral way of life, it was difficult for foreign missionaries to reach the Maasai with the gospel. One missionary, however, would try a novel approach. He would live among them. He would live in a traditionally-constructed home, participate in their way of life, eat their food—except that which conflicted with Scripture by having blood in it—and follow their customs. Other missionaries ridiculed him mercilessly for his effort. But, in the end, the elders invited this foreign missionary to sit on their local council among the people in the region in which he lived! He could now share the gospel and many were saved as a result.

As a church, we shouldn't divide or distinguish ourselves based upon some arbitrary factor—race, language, culture, customs, or socio-economic background—as long as it doesn't conflict with Scripture. If it does, then we must obviously change it and conform to what God has said. But, if it doesn't, then we cannot let it divide us and distract us from our God-given mission as a church. Rather than focusing on our differences, we should focus on the similarities we have in Christ—namely, how God has saved us and how He now wants to work through us to accomplish His will. We should seek to mature together and serve in the local church in which He has placed us. When united in Christ and submitted to His leadership, we can accomplish much more together with His help!

Question
3

What differences or distinctions in the church can distract us from working together to accomplish God's will?

Second, we must recognize the influence that we have on other people through our actions. We may not regard ourselves as an “influencer” or a role model, but someone is always watching us. Look at children who embarrassingly imitate the unsavory speech, the gratuitous gossip, or the bad habits of their parents. Much to our chagrin, we ask, “Where did you learn that?” They reply, “Mom or Dad.” We might think that they're not even paying attention, but they are! If we call ourselves a follower of Christ, people will watch how we conduct our lives. Generally, people are more predisposed to imitate what they see over what they read or hear from Scripture. Hence, we have that idiom, “Do as I say not as I do.” Both our speech and actions, however, should be consistent with Scripture and imitate Christ lest we lead someone astray (1 Cor 11:1; Phil 2:5; Eph 5:1). Although this principle especially applies to those in leadership roles like Peter (see Jas 3:1-2), it really applies to everyone who follows Christ. Ultimately, people are responsible for the choices they make in how they live, but we also bear responsibility for being a bad influence when we don't adhere to Scripture.

Question
4

In what ways do we have influence over others in the church—whether we're a leader or not?

THE CORRUPTION OF THE GOSPEL:

When Paul saw that they were not straight-forward about the truth of the gospel, he exposed the fundamental flaw in their thinking (v. 14). The word translated **straightforward** means to walk in a straight line. As such, it emphasizes the incongruence of their behavior with the message of **the gospel** for all people. Although Paul condemns the practice of the entire group for separating from the Gentiles, he singles out Peter and confronts him publicly (i.e., **before all**). Why does he confront Peter publicly rather than privately? The reason centers solely on the nature of the sin. First, the sin occurred in public. Everyone could see the dysfunction it caused. It harmed the true message of **the gospel**, so the issue needed to be addressed publicly because of the great influence it had over individuals within the body who followed Peter's errant example.

Second, leaders have a greater responsibility in the church. They are obligated to the Lord both to teach the Word and live by it faithfully because their words and actions wield great influence over the community. In a letter to his protégé whom he had dispatched to Ephesus to deal with doctrinal errors, Paul writes, "Those [leaders] who are sinning rebuke in the presence of all, that the rest also may fear" (1 Tim 5:20). For this same reason, Paul confronted Peter publicly because the entire church needed to hear the message—to safeguard the integrity of **the gospel**—so that those who had followed this abhorrent practice would repent and fellowship could be restored. In our day, we must clearly distinguish between items of personal preference and doctrinal or theological errors lest the church also become divided. Just because you don't like or agree with something doesn't give you the right to "confront" others in the church. But if it is a doctrinal error that clearly contradicts or distorts Scripture, then we must speak in love and stand on what God's Word says.

Question
5

What biblically constitutes a valid reason to confront someone publicly over sin and clear theological error? What should the purpose of the confrontation always be?

Paul has now arrived at the heart of the issue which he encapsulates with a rhetorical question: **“If you, being a Jew live in the manner of Gentiles, and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?”** Typically, most translators and commentators link this question to Peter’s reversal of his practice where he once overlooked the difference in customs between the two groups so he could have fellowship with them. It doesn’t mean that Peter abandoned Jewish customs himself, but that he didn’t practice the rigid separation from the Gentiles as did other Jews. But all this changed. He began to observe that same rigid separation. Yet, when we understand this question in terms of the larger context that follows, it gives us deeper insight. Throughout Galatians, the word **live** carries with it two connotations: 1) being made alive in Christ in terms of our salvation and 2) conduct or behavior in the way we live after our salvation. In the immediate context, the first meaning plays a pivotal role. Thus, Paul asks, “If you a Jew by birth were made alive in Christ in the exact same way as the Gentiles, why do you force them to follow Jewish customs?” Through this pointed question, Paul reminds Peter that God has already revealed to him that both Jew and Gentile are **justified by faith in Christ**—saved in the same way (v. 16)! Therefore, we can fellowship one with another in the church despite our very different backgrounds because Christ has saved us. Religious rituals don’t unite us; Christ does.

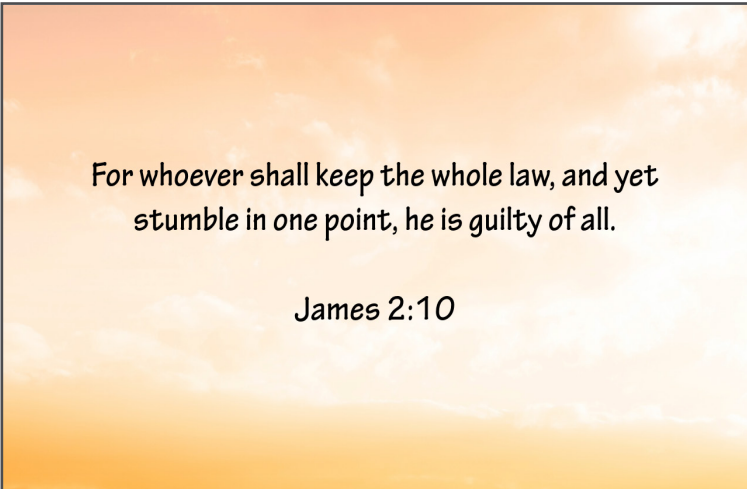
Question # 6

What does biblical unity in Christ look like rightly applied in the church?

Over the next three verses, Paul seeks to demonstrate that both Jew and Gentile are actually on equal footing when it comes to God. Based upon their physical lineage, Jews regarded the **Gentiles** as **sinners** because God hadn’t established a covenant with them or given them **the law** (v. 15). Hence, the Jews saw themselves favored as God’s chosen people, not **sinners** who needed a Savior. Paul, however, points out the flaw in this line of reasoning. The Jews are **sinners** too! They cannot declare themselves righteous even though God had given them **the law** (v. 16). **The law** itself cannot justify or make innocent; it can only reveal sin (v. 17). As **sinners**, both Jew and Gentile can only be **justified by faith in Jesus Christ—not works of the law** (v. 16). So, the argument comes full circle back to Paul’s original question to Peter. If you as a **Jew** are **justified by Jesus** just like **the Gentiles** and can’t earn salvation by doing good **works** in keeping **the law**, then why do you demand that they honor the rituals specific to

Jews?

In modernity, popular belief holds this same line of errant thinking found among the Jews. Many regard that being a good person or doing good things (i.e., **works of the law**) merit eternal life when the good outweighs the bad. Some pin their hopes on their physical lineage—being born into a “Christian” family or being raised in the church. Speaking from a legal position, however, Paul reiterates that these things don’t matter. They cannot declare one innocent or **justified**. In fact, they do the opposite. Because we cannot keep **the** whole **law** and we continue to engage in the human tendency to sin, we all stand guilty as **sinners! The law** only reveals our inadequacies—not our goodness (see [Isa 64:6](#)). Only Christ, who perfectly fulfilled **the law** and endured the death penalty on our behalf, can justify or declare us righteous when we put our **faith** and trust in Him! He has given us His righteousness when we didn’t deserve it as if we had never broken **the law** once!



For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet
stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.

James 2:10

To establish that both Jew and Gentile have sinned, Paul asks, “**But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found to be sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin**” (v. 17)? In verse 18, he answers this question by explaining why we must trust in Christ alone and not our own **works**. **If** we return to the things we **destroyed**—namely having confidence in what we can do ourselves by fulfilling **the law**—then we become transgressors. We have no hope because our own righteousness falls short of salvation. The thing on which we pinned our hopes to save us—**the law**—actually condemns us for our imperfections. As a result, we have nullified Jesus’ sacrifice and placed our hope in something that cannot justify or save! Thus, we are found **to be sinners** without hope of eternal life. In verse 21, Paul reinforces this point more succinctly saying, “**I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain.**”

Question
7

How would you help someone who depends upon good works or being a good person for salvation to understand the gospel?

THE CRUCIFIXION WHICH TRANSFORMS:

Paul continues to challenge Peter by demonstrating how he has “put to death” this old way of thinking that following **the law** can somehow make someone righteous (v. 19). He has come to recognize that it cannot save. But he hadn’t always thought this way. In Philippians, the Apostle describes himself as once having “confidence in the flesh” because he viewed himself as “blameless, concerning the righteousness which is in the law” ([Phil 3:4, 6](#)). Yet, when he met Jesus on the road to Damascus, he realized his own sinfulness and how only Christ could save him by dying in his place. In this sense, Paul **through the law died to the law** so that he **might live to God** through Christ.

We now arrive at one of the most quoted verses in all Paul’s letters: **I have been crucified with Christ, it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me** (v. 20). Technically, this thought didn’t originate with

Then He said to them all, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.

Luke 9:23

Paul, but Jesus Himself who instructed His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” ([Luke 9:23](#)). Both these verses demand the same thing: we must put to death our old way of living and thinking to follow Christ and His example. With this principle, we return to the illustration of marriage given in the introduction. Marriage should completely change the way we think and act. Christ also transforms the way we think and live even more drastically than marriage because He makes us a new creation in Him ([2 Cor 5:17](#))!

We certainly must have the right perspective about salvation which is Paul’s primary focus here, but we can expand this principle beyond the doctrine of salvation to the way we now conduct ourselves **in Christ**. We should have a new walk! Paul will eventually address this topic more fully in chapter 5. But here we must understand that Christ changes everything about us. We should no longer be dominated by selfish

thoughts and actions. We must put them to death! Instead, we should think and act in a way that brings glory to the Lord. The world looks at things in terms of how they make them feel, what benefits they bring them, and what risks or costs are involved. This self-centered thinking leads people to engage in acts of sin whereby they fulfill the lusts of the flesh ([Gal 5:16](#)). The Spirit, in contrast, leads us to practice a righteousness that unselfishly pleases God and honors Him.

We'll spend much more time analyzing this new way of thinking and acting when we study chapter 5. In the meantime, we can identify three applications from this chapter which should govern our perspective. First, recognize the need for salvation for all people by remembering how God graciously forgave and saved you. This allows us to respond humbly without condemnation and take **the gospel** freely even to the most reprehensible reprobate! Second, don't simply follow the crowd or even your heart. Follow Christ. Do what is right according to Scripture no matter what others may say or do. A consensus of opinion doesn't lead to unity or save us; only Christ does. Third, put aside personal preferences and differences, for we have more similarity in Christ than differences. We should focus on working together to glorify Christ and build His church. When division and problems arise, we must seek God's discernment from His Word, correct error, and restore in love. In doing this, we can **live** as Christ intended through the transformation He has offered in His indwelling presence to those whom He has saved.

Question
8

What old ways of thinking or acting have you had to put to death to follow Christ?

To “live by faith in the Son of God” entails that we fully adopt His perspective and surrender ourselves completely to His lordship. We no longer should be concerned with getting things our way or finding things that meet our preferences and expectations. His desires should consume us. His thoughts should fill our minds. His holy example should drive how we conduct our lives every day. Because we can only have life through the sacrifice He made on our behalf, we must die to the life of sin and personal preference we once held dear. And we must live for Him by partnering with other believers in the church in unity to exalt His name and fulfill the purpose to which He has called us!

Incorporate

How does a world that promotes unity and equality actually divide us by focusing on differences? How should we respond in Christ?

What's the difference in understanding Jesus' call to "take up our cross daily" or putting to death our old way of life versus seeing it as a call to make "sacrifices?" How do some people misunderstand what it means to sacrifice?

Why is unity so important in the church? How does Christ bring about true unity? What should we do if there is disunity or disagreement in the church?

April 28, 2024



Live by the Crucifixion

Galatians 3:1-9

Focal Verse:

“O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified?”

Galatians 3:1

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Most of us probably engage in some type of activity in which success depends upon following a specific set of principles and techniques. It really doesn't matter what type of activity that may be, whether sports, recreation, hobbies, cooking, or even job-related; it all requires a mastery of the fundamentals. Such mastery begins with a cognitive understanding of the basic skills required to complete the task. We must first learn the right way of doing something! And then, through repetition and rehearsal, apply these practical skills to the actual undertaking of the task. Only when we both know and apply the fundamentals can we have any measure of success.

Even though we may cognitively understand the importance of fundamentals, if we develop bad habits over time and don't abide by them, we will inevitably fail.

Using an illustration from football will help us better make this connection. On September 10, 2021 North Carolina A&T lost to Duke 45 to 17.* North Carolina A&T played a fairly tight game through the first two quarters—only down one touchdown at halftime. But then something happened that resulted in this lopsided final score. In a post-



game interview, Head Coach Sam Washington explains, "Talk a little bit about the Duke game: I thought we, um, went into the ballgame prepared and I thought we played well initially. Uh, but the intensity, for some reason, we lost." Although he commends Duke's effort and doesn't just make excuses, Coach Washington concludes the interview asserting, "We've got to get back to playing our brand of football—doing the little things that we normally do very well and, um, that's paying attention to detail, um the fundamentals of tackling, and offensively getting the hat on the hat and allowing athletes, um, to do what they do."**

Obviously, the team knew the fundamentals and took the field with "intensity," but they became distracted at some point. They lost focus and didn't apply what they knew to be right. Here, in Galatians 3, Paul gives a similar pep talk to the churches in Galatia. The same thing happened to them. They started off well doctrinally believing that salvation comes through faith by the gracious sacrifice of Jesus, but then they

Introduce

lost focus. They forgot the fundamentals and allowed others to influence their beliefs so that they began wrongly thinking salvation is Christ plus works (following the law, participating in the festivals, and practicing circumcision). Therefore, Paul urged them to return to the right way of thinking about the gospel and to reject these false ideas presented to them.

Like the Galatians, we too must make sure that we know the truth about salvation and abide by God's Word on the matter. We must practice and proclaim the fundamentals of faith: we are justified only by faith in Christ Jesus and not by our own works. Unlike sports, this isn't a game; it's much more serious. This is a matter of life and death. So, we must be right about this fundamental issue if we hope to have eternal life. Our personal opinion in this case doesn't matter, rather our fundamental, or correct, belief depends solely upon what God has stated in the Bible. And here in Galatians He has spelled it out clearly for us. We live by what Christ has done for us through the crucifixion—not by what we ourselves can do on our own!

Key
Question

In what way does our culture seek to influence our beliefs—particularly the fundamental tenets of our faith?

In Reference



**For the box score of the game, see www.foxsports.com; ** Sam Washington, "092021 Fball Press Conference 3, " (September 1, 2021), available from www.youtube.com*

Galatians 3:1-4

THE FOOLISHNESS OF THE FLESH:

Paul commences this main portion of his letter with a direct assessment of the **Galatians'** folly for compromising their dependence upon Christ alone for their salvation, supplementing it with human works and rituals. He boldly brands them as **foolish** (v. 1). The word translated **foolish** by the majority of our English versions means “not comprehending” or even more aptly “not thinking carefully.” Paul doesn’t call them foolish in the sense of being ignorant or even stupid, but rather he bluntly charges them with not thinking critically. The **Galatians** actually knew better which makes their uncritical thinking even worse! We’d say something like this, “Oh, you Galatians, you didn’t think this through!” They didn’t critically analyze the message of these false teachers to discern the error in it. It sounded “good” and appealed to them, so they accepted it without giving it a second thought ([2 Tim 4:3-4](#)).

Teenagers, especially boys, have the tendency to do things without completely thinking through all the consequences and potential outcomes. Influencers and peers can often talk them into **foolish** things that may seem exciting and good at the time, but in the end can lead to total disaster. While driving our teens to camp last summer, a group of boys continually begged me to race Dr. Buckles who was driving another group of teens in our church van. But I wouldn’t bite. So, they started baiting me to pass cars and even run a motorcycle off the road. At that point, I reminded them that life is not a videogame. Our actions have consequences—even pointing out that fifteen-passenger vans can easily flip when driven recklessly at high speeds which could have catastrophic and deadly consequences. Therefore, we need to stop and think before we act.

Although teenagers bear the brunt of being charged with **foolish** shenanigans, many people regardless of their age often don’t



Instruct

think things totally through before they engage in them! Whether in what we believe or how we live, we cannot afford to be **foolish**. We must carefully consider everything before we engage in it. We need to use the intellect God has given us to discern the right path to take in life. To avoid foolishness, we must ask four questions in addition to just weighing the “cost” and “benefit” or “pros” and “cons” of the action: 1) what does God’s Word say, 2) do my actions glorify the Lord and edify His people, 3) how will this help me grow and mature in my own faith, and 4) what effect do my actions have on others (i.e., my testimony as well my relationships)? We need to think carefully and critically so that we might pattern ourselves after Christ and avoid reverting to our former way of life.

Question
1

At what times in life have you found yourself saying, “I wish I’d thought more about this before I acted?” What lessons did you learn from it?

This uncritical thinking thus leads Paul to ask a rather pointed question: **Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth?** By Paul’s day, the word **bewitched** had become associated with the practice of giving someone “the evil eye.” This specifically involved “witchcraft exercised through hostile looks or words,” usually as a result of jealousy over another’s success.* As such, it carries the connotation of employing magic through an evil glance which holds the victim captive by its spell bringing misfortune and harm upon them. So, what is Paul saying here? These false teachers hadn’t literally put a spell on the **Galatians**, but their errant doctrine did hold them captive and prevented them from following and practicing **the truth**.

In Reference



*See T. Dellings, s.v. βλασκάω, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1999), p. 594-595.

A careful examination of magic will help us better understand Paul's illustration. To be effective, magic relies solely on deception. To conceal how he performs a trick, a good magician will create a distraction to divert the audience's attention. While focused on that distraction, the audience misses what the magician actually does to perform the trick. We call this diversionary tactic sleight of hand. In the same way, these false teachers who had infiltrated the Galatian churches deceived them by presenting them with a distraction. They captured the **Galatians'** attention and had them focused on religious rituals rather than **the truth** of Christ crucified for our sins. When we don't think carefully and critically in accordance with Scripture about what we hear, what we do, and what we believe, we can easily become distracted and miss **the truth!**

Question
2

Like a magician using sleight of hand, how does our culture attempt to deceive or distract us?

Before moving on to the last part of this verse, we need to answer the question Paul has asked: **who?** **Who** refers to anyone who has distorted or corrupted the message of the gospel—particularly here in Galatians the false teachers peddling ritual over a relationship with Christ Jesus. In our day, the culture unfortunately wields a powerful influence over many churches and individuals, leading to the gospel being compromised. Culture has figuratively cast a spell on people and held them captive

from discerning **the truth**. They don't think critically. They blindly rush to participate and follow what the culture espouses. They seek out and listen to what they find appealing, they follow what seems most fashionable, and they do what feels good without ever considering what God has said. As a result, they often allow culture to redefine and rationalize those things God clearly condemns as sin. They allow culture to persuade them to remake God into their own



“ideal” image rather than conforming their lives to His true character as Scripture demands ([Rom 12:1-2](#)). This all leads to a corruption of the gospel and a distorted view of salvation which ends in destruction rather than eternal life.

Our culture acts as a master magician, using sleight of hand to deceive people from **the truth**. For example, it peddles the lie that you cannot “love” someone unless you “accept” what they do. As such, they wrongly contend that God cannot “love” us and condemn sin in our lives at the same time. They erroneously surmise that if God indeed truly “loved” us, then He would “accept” us just as we are. This belief, therefore, is symptomatic of a much larger problem whereby culture has tried to redefine what constitutes “sin”—a key distraction when presenting the gospel. This leads to the false assumption that we can live however we want and God will always “accept” us no matter what. Thus, culture has deceived many into thinking that they have no need to repent and, therefore, no need for a Savior!

As a result, many kinds of sin (as defined by Scripture) have become normalized and accepted. People don’t even bat an eye over much of it anymore and parade it publicly without shame. Yet, God’s holiness requires that He punish sin. Still, His love for us also compelled Him to provide a way that we can overcome sin through His Son’s sacrifice. The truth is that those who do not truly turn from their sin (repent) and trust in Christ will spend eternity in Hell. We cannot openly live an unrepentant lifestyle of sin without any conviction and say that we have a relationship with Christ even if our culture tells us otherwise. To have eternal life, we must allow God to make us accepted ([Eph 1:6](#)) by transforming us from sinful to holy which He does through Christ.

Question
3

Why is it so difficult for culture to grasp the need for repentance or being made accepted before God through Christ? How do we see the effects of this misunderstanding in some churches today?

Through the second part of this question, Paul aims to remind them what they have already heard from him and knew as fact: **before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified?** In this context, the word translated **clearly portrayed** means to display or announce publicly and refers to the gospel which Paul had preached among them. Unlike the false teachers, Paul hasn’t used deception, trickery, or slick talk to persuade them ([see also 1 Cor 2:1-5](#)). On the contrary, he has **clearly**

presented them with **the truth** which can easily be substantiated by historical proof. If the Galatians had wished to verify Paul's claims, they could. Not only was Jesus' crucifixion a matter of public record in the Roman Empire, but many eyewitnesses who were still alive at that time could testify of the event. Above all, the empty tomb offered even more positive proof that Jesus was indeed the Messiah who had the power to grant eternal life to all those who believed.

However, neither the Galatians nor the false teachers questioned the historicity of the crucifixion. They did something far worse. They questioned its significance by adding "requirements" to it! Paul points this out to help them understand that Jesus didn't base the salvation which He offered on a bunch

of religious rituals and rules as his opponents had begun to propose. Had He done so, Jesus wouldn't have had to die! He could have simply taught us to follow these religious traditions to live. But He didn't. Jesus died on the cross for our sins. His crucifixion, therefore, is the central component of our salvation because He took our place and gave us His righteousness (1 Cor 2:2).

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Colossians 2:8

Question
4

In what ways do some people challenge the significance of the cross today?

To stress the importance of the crucifixion, Paul asks the Galatians a second question: **Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith** (v. 2)? Here, in this question, Paul uses the phrase **receive the Spirit** synonymously with salvation. At the moment we turn from our sins and trust in Christ, the Holy **Spirit** takes up residence in our hearts where He transforms us and demonstrates that we belong to God (Rom 8:14-17). Thus, the Spirit serves as a guarantee that we have moved from death to life (2 Cor 1:22; Eph 1:13-14). In essence, Paul asks, "Were you saved from your sins by doing good works or were you saved by believing (i.e., **hearing**) the gospel which tells about the work Christ did on the cross?" Obviously, the Galatians must answer by **faith**—believing in Christ. They themselves hadn't done anything to merit their salvation. Jesus saved them by what He had done for them on the cross!

Although no illustration can perfectly capture what Jesus did for us, consider this example. Two brothers found themselves at the opposite ends of the spectrum when it came to their behavior. One constantly found himself in trouble from all the mischief in which he participated. The other brother, however, followed his parents' boundaries explicitly—one would say to a "T." One day, the first brother once again found himself on the receiving end of his parents' wrath. While the first was about to learn his fate for the rules he had broken, the other brother suddenly interrupted. Surprisingly, he told his parents that he would take whatever punishment that his brother would have received upon himself no matter how severe it may be if only they would forgive his brother's dastardly deeds and he would turn from his evil ways.

The first brother now simply had to accept what the other had done for him and trust that it would satisfy the wrath of his parents against the wrong he had committed! He certainly hadn't done anything



to deserve this gracious gift, nor could he ever do enough "good" deeds to cause his parents to overlook this one transgression—let alone all the other wrongs that he had done over the years. Yet, because of what his brother was willing to do, he would no longer find himself incurring the wrath of his parents, but back in right standing. However, he could never regain this right standing with his parents on his own without punishment. His brother would make it possible by taking the punishment upon himself and serving the sentence on his behalf!

He now had a choice: Does he accept what his brother was willing to do for him or reject it, attempting to sort through matters on his own? Even if he promised to behave and follow all his parents' rules from that day forward, one problem remained: punishment must still be levied against the original transgression. In other words, he must face the consequences for his actions. Sin cannot go unpunished. Either he must trust his brother to fulfill the requirement on his behalf or face the punishment himself. The Galatians, and we for that matter, faced the same issue. God wouldn't simply

overlook their sin just because they promised to behave, follow His law, and faithfully practice religious traditions from that day forward. Someone must pay the debt they owed! Their sin could not go unpunished. They could not regain right standing with their heavenly Father on their own; it had to come through Christ who settled the debt for their sin! Either they trusted Christ to pay the penalty or they would face the consequence of their sins themselves.

Question
5

Why does sin often look like it goes unpunished? How does this appearance influence the way that some people think? How should we respond as believers?

Admittedly, the Galatians had started well. They had trusted in Christ for their salvation and had **begun** their new life **in the Spirit** (v. 3). However, somewhere along the way they had allowed others to corrupt their thinking and so lost focus on the fundamentals of the faith which Paul shows by continuing to ask a series of rhetorical questions intended to spur them to think much more carefully about what they believe and practice. If they had **begun in the Spirit**, why do they now think that they can be **made perfect by the flesh**? This question actually serves as an indictment against them. They had turned from what Christ had done for them to what they could do on their own power! By relying on what they themselves could do, the Galatians had nullified the effectiveness of Christ's sacrifice. In a sense, they tried to reconcile the problem of sin on their own by what they could do physically. But all this did was to reinstitute their death sentence because none of what they could do on their own would satisfy the penalty and lead to life! Paul desperately wants them to understand this so that they might correct their course.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

From this question, we can also glean another principle pertinent to our own situation. If we have trusted Christ to save us and His Holy **Spirit** lives within us, we must also trust Him to help us mature in our walk and live holy lives—that is to make us

perfect (Phil 1:6). Herein lies another fundamental problem for many believers. Many rightly trust Christ to save them, but then they rely on their own power to live transformed lives. Just as in our salvation, we cannot grow or mature in our faith apart from Christ's help (1 Cor 10:13). We can't do this on our own no matter how hard we might try! We must certainly put forth effort on our part, but only when we rely on Christ will we see fruitful results.

So many believers resign themselves to defeat because they trust in their own power (i.e., **by the flesh**) to transform their thinking and behavior. When they continue making mistakes, they wonder why. Some even throw in the towel saying, "What's the use? I can't change." The latter statement does bear some truth. On our own, we can't change! We need Christ. Performing certain actions, following ten-steps, reading self-help books, and practicing religious rituals can't truly change the way we think and they definitely can't make us holy. Rather, allowing **the Spirit** of God to work within us and guide us truly changes the way we think and will make us holy. It's the very definition of foolishness to know that we must depend upon Christ alone for our salvation, but then think that we can rely on our own human faculties apart from Him to live a transformed and holy life. We must rely on Him for both!

Question
6

In what ways do we sometimes trust in ourselves to transform the way that we behave and think? How do these instances usually turn out?

Paul ends this section with another direct question: **Have you suffered so many things in vain—if indeed it was in vain** (v. 4)? In this context, the word translated suffer does not specifically refer to persecution or hardships they endured because of their faith as we tend to regard it. Instead, it means to experience. Paul is reminding them that they had seen (or experienced) the work of **the Holy Spirit** first-hand in their lives. They could point to the evidence of their salvation through their changed lives (see also 1 Thess 1:6-10). Because they had witnessed this evidence first-hand, Paul urges them to continue doing what had gotten them there in the first place: trusting Christ—not what they could do on their own! To borrow a modern expression, "If it's not broken, don't fix it!" When we rely on Christ, we will always have success according to His definition. But when we put ourselves into the equation and begin to rely on what we can do, we will often find ourselves in desperate peril and defeated.

THE FAITH WHICH WORKS:

In verse 5, Paul brings his argument to a logical conclusion by prompting them to contemplate how God Himself has worked among them as the One **who supplies the Spirit and works miracles**. We tend to regard miracles as supernatural instances of healing the sick, raising the dead, casting out demons, and other kinds of inexplicable acts which God uses to display His glory. But this misses the point here! Such an interpretation actually becomes one of those distractions of which we spoke earlier that can cause us to lose focus on the primary issue. While God can unquestionably perform supernatural acts of this magnitude—based on the context here in Galatians—supplying **the Spirit** and working **miracles** refer to the same event: salvation.

Salvation and the accompanying transformation of our lives are both miracles from our perspective because we can't do these things on our own! Only God, through Christ, has the power to perform them—the point which Paul has made from the very beginning of our study. To rephrase the question in the way that Paul intends us to understand it, he asks us, "How does God accomplish our salvation? Does He do it through our good works or by the hearing of faith?" Thus, this essentially reflects the same question that he has already asked in verse 2. And the answer remains the same. God accomplishes salvation through our **faith** in Christ as communicated by the gospel. The Galatians can be confident of this because they have seen the evidence of God's work in their lives through their own salvation.

Now, Paul cites **Abraham** as an explicit example to illustrate the importance of **faith** over mere ritual. He quotes Genesis 15:6 which announces that **Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness** (v. 6). In other words, Abraham's relationship with God was predicated upon his **faith** in Him and not through what he did. When we look look at the covenant ([Gen 12:1-4](#)), we see that God initiated it, God guaranteed it,

And those who heard it said, "Who then can be saved?" But He said, "The things which are impossible with men are possible with God."

Luke 18:26-27

and God brought it to fulfillment or completion. God did everything! Abraham, on the other hand, only had to accept what God had done, trust in Him to fulfill His promises, and respond with **faith**. **Abraham** demonstrated that he had **faith** in God by what he did. He obeyed what God had told him to do. Thus, the evidence of our **faith** is our obedience to the Lord.

Our covenant, or salvation, in Christ functions in exactly the same way. God initiated it by sending His Son: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him might not perish but have everlasting life” ([John 3:16](#)). God guaranteed it. Both the Old and New Testament are replete with examples of God’s faithfulness to His Word and His people ([2 Thess 3:3](#); [2 Tim 2:11-13](#)). God brought it to fulfillment or completion. When Jesus cried on the cross, “It is finished” ([John 19:30](#)), the Greek literally means “paid in full.” Christ paid our debt in full that Friday before Passover. Through Christ, God accomplished everything! We had nothing left to do except to trust that He would fulfill His promise and respond in **faith**. Like **Abraham**, the evidence of our **faith** is our obedience to the Lord as expressed particularly through the transformed and holy lives which we now live.

Question
7

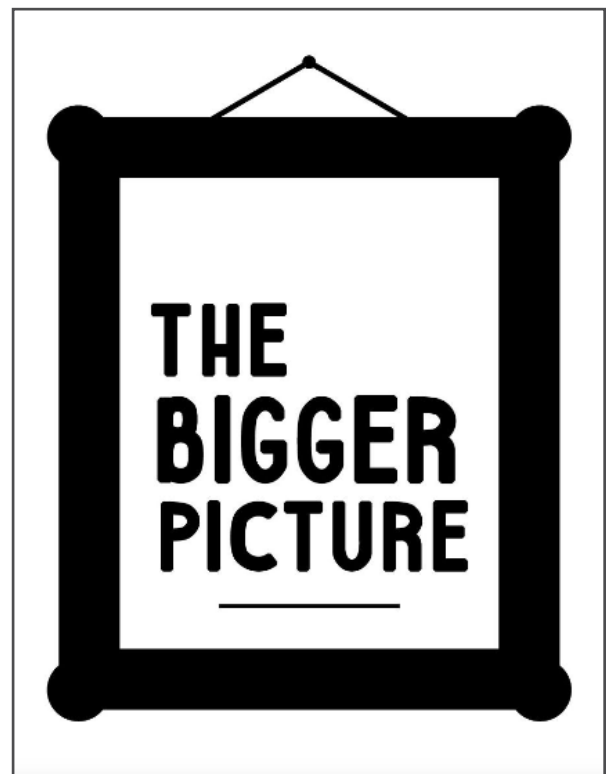
What kind of evidence indicates that we live by faith?

Paul then underscores **that only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham** (v. 7). To understand what he means, remember the initial problem which prompted him to write this letter. The false teachers claimed that the Gentiles must adopt Jewish practices and customs, especially circumcision, in order to be full members of the church. In essence, they wrongly taught that Gentiles must essentially become Jews in order to be the people of God—that is **sons of Abraham** to borrow their language! Paul, however, stresses that no physical requirement, such as circumcision, or religious ritual, practice, or tradition can make one a child of God. Rather, **faith** in God identifies one His child. This Gospel of John makes this point explicitly: “But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name” ([John 1:12](#)).

Furthermore, this covenant that God made with **Abraham** foreshadowed the work He would accomplish through Christ. For this reason, Paul notes that it **preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand** (v. 8). In other words, it foretold of the coming of

Christ. In Genesis 12:3, God revealed to **Abraham**, “**In you all the nations shall be blessed.**” And He often reminded **Abraham** of this promise throughout the rest of his life ([Gen 18:18](#); [22:18](#); [26:4](#); [28:14](#)). By quoting this verse, Paul wants us to understand that God always had a bigger picture in mind more than just a covenant with one man and his physical descendants. He wanted to redeem the whole world—**all the nations**. Therefore, salvation and the invitation to be God’s people never belonged exclusively to the Jews. Because of their faithfulness to Him, God did use **Abraham** and His descendants who served Him to usher in the One who could redeem the world.

On their own, neither **Abraham** nor his descendants could redeem the world because of their own faults and imperfections. In fact, at times, the Jewish people repelled the Gentiles causing them to curse God rather than repent and be drawn into a relationship with Him ([Isa 52:5](#); [Ezek 36:22](#); [Rom 2:24](#)). As a result, like the Gentiles, Israel needed someone who could save her as well. And only Christ—the sinless sacrifice born through the faithful descendants—could fulfill this role! Christ isn’t stingy with His grace. He offers the same life to all who trust in Him regardless of any external factor like ethnicity or nationality. Through Christ, God has indeed **blessed** everyone—both Jew and Gentile—with the gift of salvation if only they would trust Him and accept His gracious offer in **faith** (v. 9).



With a lesson largely on doctrine and theology, we may sometimes overlook the practical application for us. However, we can find two applications here that will help us be better witnesses. First, our culture often charges those who believe in Christ with being exclusive and intolerant. Although we have little space to flesh this out fully, in short, we can say that Christ excludes no one; He makes the same generous offer to all. They have just chosen to reject it; they have excluded themselves! Second, we ourselves must proactively point people to Christ—all people no matter whether they look, act, dress, talk, or think like we think they should. It doesn’t matter. Christ died for them, too. If they accept Him by faith, He will save them just like He did us. And like He

transformed us, so will He also transform them. The gospel is for all people, so we must share it freely!

Inspire

If we have a relationship with Christ, we ought to have a basic cognitive understanding of the fundamentals of our faith. We ought to be able to tell others how they can have a relationship with Christ too. So, the question that we must ask ourselves is, “Do we practice and apply these fundamentals in our lives?” Did we begin with gusto like North Carolina A&T and then somewhere along the way grow lethargic and lose enthusiasm, forgetting the very things to which Christ has called us? It never hurts to have a pep talk to remind us of the things which we should be practicing—focusing on the fundamentals. Unlike a football coach who stands on the sideline giving direction, we have a “Coach” in Christ who walks with us daily. Just as we were made alive through His crucifixion, not by anything we ourselves could do, so also will Christ empower us to proclaim the gospel if only we would trust Him to equip and use us as He sees fit.

Incorporate

What characteristics define us (or at least should) as a people of faith?

When our culture says that Christ is “exclusive,” what do they really mean? How can we help them to have the correct understanding of who Christ is and what He came to do?

In what ways can we sometimes wrongly be selective about who we share the gospel with? In what ways can we incorporate a discussion on the gospel into our everyday lives?

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