

GALATIANS LESSON 2

HOME STUDY QUESTIONS

PAUL ESTABLISHES HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

GALATIANS 1:11–2:21

In this section of the letter, Paul establishes his authority and credibility as an apostle by revealing how his life has changed since he encountered Christ. As you read, look for glimpses into Paul's complex personality and his passion for proclaiming the truth of the gospel. As he stands up to those who oppose him, he challenges us to develop the same unwavering faith in Christ that he has.

Please take time to read the entire Scripture passage before you begin the questions. Questions marked *For deeper thought* or *For further study* are optional. Those marked *For personal thought* need not be answered out loud in your Core Group. Record the verses where you find your answers.

DAY ONE

WRITE GOD'S WORD FOR THE WEEK: GALATIANS 2:16A.

"A man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ."

GALATIANS 1:1-17—GOD CALLS PAUL

1. Who is the author of the gospel Paul preaches?
2.
 - a. Read 1:6-9. Do you think some Christians today are still being confused and deceived by "*a gospel other than the one we preached to you*"?
 - b. What kinds of things might result from following "*a different gospels*"?
3. In 1:13-14, when Paul speaks of his "*previous way of life*," how does he describe it?

4. What is Paul's specific calling (Galatians 1:16-17; Acts 26:17-18)?

DAY TWO

WRITE GOD'S WORD FOR THE WEEK: GALATIANS 2:16A.

GALATIANS 1:18-24—PAUL VISITS JERUSALEM

5. Why do you think Paul wants to meet Peter? What do you learn about Peter from these passages?
 - a. Matthew 16:13-20
 - b. John 20:3-9
 - c. Acts 2:14
 - d. Acts 4:1-13
 - e. Acts 11:1-18
6. What is the main point of Galatians 1:24?
7. Have you ever praised God for the positive changes you have seen in the life of a fellow Christian? Give an example.

DAY THREE

WRITE GOD'S WORD FOR THE WEEK: GALATIANS 2:16A.

GALATIANS 2:1-10—THE APOSTLES ACCEPT PAUL

8. State Paul's reasons for returning to Jerusalem.
9. a. What motivates Paul's strong stand (2:4-5)?

- b. How does our culture today threaten to restrict “*the truth of the gospel*”?
10. What is Paul’s attitude toward the leaders of the Jerusalem church? (See also 1 Samuel 16:7; 1 Corinthians 1:26-31; James 4:6.)
11. What does the “*right hand of fellowship*” signify?
12. How does 2:10 show us that the “*fellowship*” of Christians go beyond agreement on doctrinal issues? (See also Acts 11:27-30; Romans 15:25-27; 1 John 3:16-18.)

DAY FOUR

WRITE GOD’S WORD FOR THE WEEK: GALATIANS 2:16A.

GALATIANS 2:11-14—PAUL CONFRONTS PETER

13. a. Describe Peter’s behavior before and after the group sent by James comes to Antioch.
- b. *For further study:* What tradition is the basis for the Jewish believers’ actions (Leviticus 20:22-26; Acts 11:2-12)?
14. What do you think Paul expects of people who are “*acting in line with the truth of the gospel*” (Galatians 2:14; see also 3:26-29)?

15. *For personal thought:* Thoughtfully consider your own lifestyle. In what areas of your life do you need to make changes to act “*in line with the truth of the gospel*”? Will you ask the Lord to help you to do so?

DAY FIVE

WRITE GOD’S WORD FOR THE WEEK: GALATIANS 2:16A.

GALATIANS 2:15-21—A RESOLUTE STAND

16. *Justification* means that God has pardoned those who believe in Christ from the penalty of sin. What does “*justified by faith in Christ*” (2:16) mean to you? (See also Ephesians 2:8-9.)
17. Why do you think living for God requires that we die to the law (Galatians 2:19; see also Romans 8:1-4)?
18. What does Galatians 2:20 mean to you?
19. In 2:21, “*grace*” and “*law*” are declared to be incompatible as far as salvation is concerned. How do you explain the tendency of people to revert, as Peter did, to “*law-keeping*”?

APPLY WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNED

For Paul, Christ's death meant everything: *"I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die"* (Galatians 2:21, NLT). Our efforts to be righteous are useless. By grace, God accepts Jesus' death as payment for our sins. In your Christian journey, have you, possibly without knowing it, started trying to please God by following certain rules rather than trusting in His grace? If so, choose to return to the freedom you have in Christ (2:4).

DAY SIX: CLASS NOTES

DAY SEVEN

PAUL ESTABLISHES HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

GALATIANS 1:11–2:21

False teachers had invaded the Galatian church, twisting the gospel and challenging Paul's authority as an apostle. Paul addresses the divisive issues facing the church by sharing his personal testimony. He defends his calling and authority as an apostle by recounting his conversion and early years of ministry, his acceptance by the Jerusalem leaders, and a confrontation with Peter. His defense of the truth leads Paul to introduce the doctrine of justification by faith.

I. PAUL'S CONVERSION AND CALL (GALATIANS 1:11–17)

The opening statements in 1:11–12 present a concise response to the Judaizers' attack on Paul's authority and message. First, Paul addresses the Galatian church as "*brothers*" (1:11), acknowledging their shared belief in Christ. Paul then states that he preaches a gospel given by direct revelation from Jesus Christ. His declaration points to Christ as the One who transmitted the gospel to him and equipped him to preach.

Paul begins to review events that led him to true knowledge of God. As a fanatic protector of Jewish law and ceremony, he "*persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it*" (1:13, ESV). He describes himself as "*extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers*" (1:14). The words chosen indicate that he literally burned with zeal to destroy anything that opposed the tradition of the Pharisees. This sect of Judaism strictly followed 613 human commandments added by rabbinical tradition to the Mosaic Law. He points out the extremes of his former position and the great gulf between it and the position he now holds to demonstrate the divine, supernatural intervention that completely turned his life around.

In 1:15, Paul declares that what God did for him was not due to his own merit or worthiness but to God's good pleasure and grace. The phrase "*called me by His grace*" takes us to Paul's conversion on the Damascus road. On a mission to apprehend and persecute Christians, Paul was blinded by a light from heaven and heard Jesus Christ speak to him, confronting him with the reality that he was actually persecuting the risen Lord. Paul experienced blindness and helplessness before the transformation to faith was finished (Acts 9).

THINK ABOUT how the dramatic change in Paul's life demonstrates God's power and grace. Every conversion comes by God's grace and power. When an honest, kind, and good-tempered person believes in Christ, it is no less a miracle than that of a seasoned sinner, even if it is less dramatic. Human nature, apart from the work of the Holy Spirit,

cannot understand or believe the gospel (1 Corinthians 2:12-14). Whether you came to know the Lord later in life or were nurtured by Christian parents so that you cannot remember a time when you did not know Christ as your Lord, the Holy Spirit was the agent of conversion.

When we trust Christ to provide forgiveness for our sins, His Spirit lives in us, guiding and transforming us to be more like Him. By God's grace and power, Paul changed from a self-righteous persecutor of Christians to a devoted follower of Christ. God will do the same for us—forgive our sins and transform our lives. *"If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!"* (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Paul's conversion was dramatic, and his specific call to ministry was clear. The main purpose of the revelation of God's Son in Paul was to make him an apostle to the Gentiles (Galatians 1:16). The phrase *"in me"* suggests the revelation filled his heart, soul, and spirit, changing him forever. Paul did not consult anyone, including the apostles in Jerusalem, for in his case, nothing is required but the all-sufficiency of God. After Paul's conversion, God evidently led him to Arabia for a period of preparation.

II. PAUL'S FIRST VISIT TO JERUSALEM (GALATIANS 1:18-24)

Continuing the chronological account, Paul describes his first visit to Jerusalem. The use of *"then"* (1:18) indicates that his visit followed his return from Arabia; *"after three years"* probably speaks of three years after Paul's conversion rather than after his return to Damascus from Arabia.

The purpose of Paul's visit is personal—*"to get acquainted with Peter"* (1:18). Paul spent 15 days with Peter, leader of the original 12 apostles. Paul mentions meeting only one other person, *"James, the Lord's brother"* (1:19). It remains unclear whether he regarded James as an apostle or, other than Peter, he was the only prominent leader in the Jerusalem congregation Paul met. James may have been the person identified as part of Jesus' family in Mark 6:3. (Scholars interpret references to Jesus' family in many ways: Passages such as Matthew 13:55 and John 7:2, 5 indicate that Mary and Joseph had children after the birth of Jesus. However, some believe that any reference to Jesus' *brother* should be taken in a broader sense, as in *cousin*.) At first, James did not believe that Jesus was the Messiah (John 7:5), but he seems to have been converted after Christ's resurrection (Acts 1:14; 1 Corinthians 15:7). Later he became head of the Jerusalem church and is credited with writing the New Testament letter of James.

Possibly motivated by the Judaizers' insinuations that his visit to Jerusalem was unimportant, Paul assures the churches that he is not lying (Galatians 1:20). He answers solemnly, stating the facts under an oath as if he were before God's judgment seat. The validity and independence of his apostleship is already being demonstrated.

IN SYRIA AND CILICIA Paul explains that he spent the next period of his life in Syria and Cilicia. According to Acts 9:26-30, intense opposition to Paul arose in Jerusalem, so the brothers took him to Caesarea and from there sent him to Tarsus, his birthplace. Paul points out that during this time the churches in Judea had only heard about the man who had formerly sought to wipe them out, but who now was proclaiming the gospel. Instead of belittling his work as the Judaizers were doing, those churches thanked God for what had happened in and through him (Galatians 1:24).

THINK ABOUT the impact Paul's transformation had on the believers in the early church. By simply recounting the facts of his life and work, Paul sets before the Galatians what they should never have doubted: a relentless persecutor and sinner of sinners had changed into a herald of the gospel. Believers no longer reacted with fear when they heard Paul's name (Acts 9:26). Instead they were praising God because of him. What emotions must have overwhelmed Paul as he wrote: *"They praised God because of me"* (Galatians 1:24)!

Our lives should reflect the transforming power of the Lord, too. Are there people who praise God because of what He has done in and through you?

III. PAUL RETURNS TO JERUSALEM (GALATIANS 2:1-10)

Paul has been describing the source of the gospel he preaches. He now presents the contents of this gospel regarding Christian liberty, beginning with an account of a private meeting in Jerusalem.

"Fourteen years later" (2:1), Paul officially confronted the church leaders. Some scholars date the 14 years from his journey to Syria and Cilicia, which was approximately three years after his conversion. However, some argue that the 14 years should date from Paul's conversion (1:18). Regardless of the uncertainty over the exact dates of events in Paul's life, the main point, supported by Acts and Galatians, is that Paul defends the gospel of freedom against the intrusion of Jewish law.

Paul's decision to give an accounting of his activities to the church leaders at Jerusalem was an act of obedience. He clearly states that he went in response to a supernatural communication of God's will (2:2). The main reason for his going, then, was not a summons from Jerusalem to account for his actions.

A PRIVATE INTERVIEW Accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, Paul met *"privately"* with the leaders of the Jerusalem church only to demonstrate that his ministry and message flowed in the mainstream of Christianity. He recognized their authority and standing within the Christian community. Paul knew the success of his ministry did not depend on the verdict of these men, but he valued their opinion. Paul's statement in verse 2, *"for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain"* implies that he understood

the importance of maintaining the unity of the gospel. If other apostles did not agree with his stand on justification by faith without the works of the Law, Paul's mission to the Gentiles would be seriously weakened. His ministry efforts would be "*in vain*" if a division developed among apostles of the gospel, or if they rejected Paul's insistence that there must be only one, unified church, open to Jews and Gentiles alike.

Far from challenging Paul's interpretation of the gospel, the apostles affirmed it. They even accepted Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, despite the objection of those who wanted all Christians to submit to circumcision. To Paul, circumcision was neither harmful nor beneficial as far as salvation was concerned (1 Corinthians 7:19). The leaders in Jerusalem openly agreed. In no circumstance would Paul compromise if it led to confusion about the essentials of salvation.

Paul explains that "*some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves*" (Galatians 2:4). Being forced to follow the Jewish law again would have been the worst kind of spiritual slavery. The uncircumcised brothers stood firm to protect the truth of the gospel.

PAUL AND BARNABAS APPROVED In conclusion, Paul notes that the leaders neither censured him nor gave him an apostolic commission. At least three of the leaders expressed satisfaction with Paul's and Barnabas' ministries. They recognized that Paul had been called to a work among the Gentiles just as Peter had been called to the Jews (2:6-8). Peter, James, and John accepted Barnabas and Paul as partners in a common task. This had to be a source of deep gratification to Paul. Probably the giving of the right hand of fellowship was done in public.

The leaders added one request: "*to remember the poor*" (2:10). Special measures were taken to help the poor at times (Acts 11:27-30). The laws of God certainly demanded work of this kind (Exodus 23:10-11; Deuteronomy 15:7-11); by exhortation of the prophets (Amos 2:6-7); by the teachings of Jesus (Matthew 7:12; 19:21; Luke 6:36, 38). Paul also believed wholeheartedly in doing good to everybody "*especially to those who belong to the family of faith*" (Galatians 6:10).

IV. PAUL CONFRONTS PETER (GALATIANS 2:11-14)

Paul minces no words as he recounts his confrontation with Peter. During a visit to Antioch, Peter had associated freely with the Christian Gentiles—even eating with them. Although this practice was not forbidden, traditionally Jews did not eat with Gentiles for fear of ritual contamination. In the new church, however, Jewish and Gentile Christians ate together in the spirit of love. The shared meals ended with the Lord's Supper and were symbols of Christian unity.

When the men "*from James*" (2:12) arrived, Peter began to separate himself from the Gentile Christians. Paul does not refer to these men as brothers. The Judaizers acted without the approval of the Jerusalem church and were disowned by it (Acts 15:24).

However, in Antioch, the combined influence of Peter and the party from Jerusalem led Barnabas and other Jewish Christians to follow their example.

THINK ABOUT what kind of example you are setting. When a leader does something wrong, as Peter did, others follow his example. Because he was afraid of the circumcision group, Peter stopped doing what he knew was right. As a result, Barnabas and many of the Jewish Christians followed his example.

Christian leaders have a great responsibility to model Christlike attitudes and actions. Anyone in a leadership position should resist pressure from associates and friends whose respect and approval is desired, and ask for discernment to know if an opinion, attitude, or action is what God wants or what people expect. Pleasing Christ must remain the primary desire. Paul said that the goal of leadership is *“to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ”* (Ephesians 4:12-13).

All Christians, whether in leadership or not, need to realize that others are watching and learning from their example. As we focus on Christ and rely on Him, our family, friends, and other people we meet will see Christ reflected in our actions and attitudes.

Paul saw the problem clearly and spoke out against Peter on the matter of principle. The very truth of the gospel was at stake. Because Peter acted in public, Paul faced him publicly. Peter’s refusal to eat with Gentile Christians and other Jewish members of the Antioch church left the Gentiles no choice but to conform to the Jewish dietary laws or suffer a division in the church. The unity and progress of the church were being threatened.

V. JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH (GALATIANS 2:15-21)

Speaking not just for Peter and himself, but for all believers, Paul proclaims his deepest convictions about the meaning of Christian faith. Paul introduces his discourse on justification by faith by first addressing Jewish Christians. He is not calling Jews *“saints”* and Gentiles *“sinners”*; he is only stating a prevailing Jewish view. What Paul really says is this: Although we as Jews are privileged people, not coarse like the Gentiles, our works done in obedience to the Law could never make us righteous in God’s sight. It is by faith in Christ and His merits, not by works of the Law, that we have received this blessing.

In 2:16, a key verse in Galatians, Paul introduces the term *justification*. The verb *to justify* is used in a legal sense as a gracious act whereby God, because Christ has paid the penalty for us, declares the sinner *just*, who then accepts the benefit only by faith. The sinner’s guilt is put onto Christ and righteousness is credited to the sinner. It is an amazing gesture of love toward the guilty.

As implied in the definition, justification as a judicial act of God does not rest on human works, nor even faith as a work of humans. It is accomplished because Christ's death fully satisfied the demands of God's law. Because no one can earn justification, one can only accept it as a gift. Faith is the hand that accepts the gift. Paul presses home the point that God's love and not human effort accomplishes this.

Galatians 2:17 seems to be answering the Judaizers' charge that without the Law as the standard for making one righteous, those who accept Christ can do whatever they please. Paul answers, "*Absolutely not!*" The gospel did not make the Jews sinners; it revealed that they were sinners already. Paul reasons that anyone who rebuilds what he has torn down proves to be "*a lawbreaker*" (2:18). Peter demonstrated this: he tore down the works of the Law when he ate with Gentiles, but when he separated himself from them, he began to rebuild the things he had torn down. If we have recognized that it is only through faith that we can get right with God, then we are rejecting Christ's work if we obey the Law as a means of reconciliation.

DEAD TO THE LAW Shifting from "*we*" to "*I*," Paul draws from his own experience. He points out that through the Law he realized his own sinfulness (Romans 3:20). At the same time, he despairs that the Law could do nothing to secure God's verdict of righteousness. Giving up all hope in the Law, he died to the Law forever.

Of course this is the negative side. In the same breath that Paul says he has "*died to the law*," he states what that death accomplishes—"*that I might live for God*" (Galatians 2:19). It is a paradox. At the moment of death, life enters. Being alive to God means being restored to new life and responsive to God's grace and to His people.

In 2:20, Paul makes it clear that Christianity is more than observing legalistic forms; it is life. The apostle sees that close identification with Christ leads the believer into spiritual fellowship with Him. In this instance the language indicates that Christ's death on the cross brings an end to the reign of Law, freeing Paul to live for God. In his own experience, Paul can now say that he has died to the past and risen in newness of life: "*I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*" (2:20). This is the new birth, or regeneration. By faith, Christ fills Paul's heart, soul, being. He is Paul's righteousness, making possible God's verdict of acquittal. Paul responds to Him in thought, word, and deed. When we combine 2:20 with the observation that in Christ dwells all the fullness of the Godhead (Colossians 2:9), we realize that in Christ the wholeness of God dwells in us.

Paul affirms what he has said to this point: "*I do not treat the grace of God as meaningless. For if keeping the law could make us right with God, then there was no need for Christ to die*" (2:21, NLT). If conforming to the Law has any merit, then Christ died for nothing. If His death and sacrifice were unnecessary, then grace would be done away with. Either God's grace is everything, or it is nothing. Either Christ's death is all, or it is nothing.

PERSONALIZE this lesson. Believers in the Galatian churches thought that they needed to add something to what Christ had done on the cross. Christians today, like the Galatians, are tempted to do the same thing. “Christ plus ...” The plus may be anything—a good cause, a particular set of rules of behavior, a prescribed dress code, membership in a particular church. If we add anything to God’s gift of salvation, we are repeating the same problem Paul fought in Galatia.

The legalists accused Paul of promoting sin. They reasoned that without the Law’s standard, it doesn’t matter what we do. Paul indignantly refuted such slander (Romans 3:8). They did not understand grace or what happens when Christ lives in a believer’s heart. Our transformed lives and good deeds provide evidence of Christ’s presence in our lives. We are not contributing to our salvation; we are simply demonstrating it. As Paul stated, *“I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me”* (Galatians 2:19-20). Christ in us enables us to do the things God wants done.

REVIEW: PAUL ESTABLISHES HIS APOSTOLIC AUTHORITY

WRITE GOD’S WORD FOR THE WEEK: GALATIANS 2:16A.

20. How would you now explain *justification* to someone unfamiliar with the term?