

## ***LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL***

### ***Galatians 2:11-15***

"But when I saw that they were not living up to the truth of the good news," this is the heart of this passage. We have before us an obvious case of compromising ones convictions about the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This incident brought into direct confrontation two of the giants in the Christian movement. On one side stood Paul the Apostle sent to the Gentiles, and on the other side stood Simon Peter the Apostle sent to the Jews. The issue at stake is of supreme importance then and now.

Again we must keep in mind the purpose of the passage of Galatians. The Apostle is sharing these personal things to help the Galatians appreciate his position as an Apostle and the trustworthiness of his message. The passage reveals him as being independent of the Apostles in Jerusalem, yea, so committed to his message that he will even confront them when they deviate from it in the least. The preaching of Peter never deviated from the truth of the Gospel, but his practicing left something to be desired. It is getting your belief and your behavior together that bothers all of us. Paul's evaluation was that they were not walking in the path their Gospel laid out before them. This is a passage with tremendous implications for us. Let's consider some of the implications and lessons to be found here.

### ***I. LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL INVOLVES RELATING TO OTHERS IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL.***

Understanding the background of this passage will make this clear. Paul prevailed in the first confrontation with the Judaizers in the conference at Jerusalem. They were compelled to admit that men are saved by faith in Jesus Christ and in him alone. They admitted, at least outwardly, that being Jewish did not give a man advantage at this point. However they did not give up. They simply altered their message a bit. They began to teach that while being Jewish was not an advantage with reference to receiving the gift of salvation, it was a tremendous advantage in gaining a place in the kingdom of God. They declared that only the circumcised and those living by the laws of Moses could ever know the joy of being in the inner circle of the saints. Those careful of the law of Moses were something special before God.

One of the rules they had gathered from the Old Testament was that Jews were to have nothing to do with Gentiles. They were not to do business with them, they were not to socialize with them. They were to always keep themselves separate from them because to be involved with them would be defiling. When Peter came to Antioch, he found some Christian Jews ignoring all such rules. Rather they were fellowshiping and eating with Gentile Christians freely and openly. Peter joined in this practice without any hesitation. It agreed with what the Lord had

revealed to Him on the housetop in Joppa, and with what he had experienced in the household of Cornelius. Then one day some people came from the church in Jerusalem who were of a different persuasion. They believed that the Jewish Christians should not fellowship and eat with Gentiles. When they made their views known to Peter, he was influenced by them to quit his practice of fellowshiping with Gentiles. Not only did he quit it, but the Jewish Christians in the church at Antioch also quit, and so did Barnabas. Suddenly it was no longer the thing to do. Only Paul realized what was happening, so he confronted Peter with the inconsistency of their actions. Their deeds were not matching their convictions about the Gospel.

The issue was clear. Does being Jewish give one a spiritual advantage? Were the Gentiles missing out on something if they did not submit to becoming Jewish as well as Christian? Would spiritual advancement come if they were to adopt the ways of the Jews? The Gospel declares that all men are sinners, and the only thing that could make any difference was to place your faith in Jesus Christ. What we preach as the Gospel should influence how we relate to others. The two should match.

How do we measure up on this point? This has searched my heart this week. Just take an illustration or two. We preach that our God freely forgives all kinds of sin, that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses us from all sin. Yet suppose this morning a known homosexual comes forward, and openly confesses his faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, and asks for a place in our fellowship. Can he have a place in our fellowship? Oh, I do not doubt that we would vote to receive him into the membership of the church, but would we really receive him into our hearts and lives? Would we not be afraid of what others might say about us? I chose homosexuality because it has so much in prominence in our day. We must not forget in the midst of all of the opposition to this sexual perversion, that God can and does forgive this sin --- and when he does, he becomes our spiritual brother. Does our preaching and our practice match here?

We preach a gospel in which social class and decisions are of no consequence. We declare that rich men and poor men come alike in the family of God. Is that our practice? Can we rejoice just as much over the repentance of a poor beggar as we can over the repentance of the banker?

Our Gospel teaches us to sing, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight." But that is not what we practice! The way we relate to others would indicate that we believe "white" to be more precious than other colors.

Unless we relate to others on the basis of the principles of the Gospel, we are not living up to the Gospel. I wonder what Paul might say to us if he were to visit the First Baptist Church, or even more seriously, what our Lord might say about this.

## ***II. LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL ENHANCES THE UNITY OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.***

What happened in Galatia is rather ironic. Peter separated himself from the Gentiles because he did not want to offend the Jewish men from Jerusalem. If you had asked him about it, he would probably have rationalized that he was forgoing this privilege for the sake of the unity of the people of God. But the result of his actions was just the opposite. What he did was divide a people that the Lord had made one. Through his action others were influenced to follow. The result was that the one church of the Lord became two --- one Jewish and one Gentile. This violated every intention that the Lord had for his church.

Nothing will bring about unity among the people of God like a people relating to each other in light of the Gospel. Let's get to the heart of this problem there in Galatia. When you followed the line offered by the Judaizers you ended up with a church within a church. You ended up with a little clique of super saints looking down on the poor, underprivileged Gentile Christians. They were saying to the Gentiles, "You have Jesus, and you have salvation, but we have the law of Moses. We have been circumcised and we are the inner circle. If you would like to become a part of this inner circle, you must submit to circumcision and become Jewish in your lifestyle." Everything about this was contrary to the principles of the Gospel. The Gospel declares that one receives full status in the family of God through faith in the finished work of the Lord Jesus Christ. You cannot add anything to Christ. There is no such inner circle in the family of God. You and I need to be careful that we do not make false distinctions in the family of God. When we live by the Gospel it enhances the unity of body, it does not divide it.

If you feel like you are in some kind of inner circle, let me remind you of a couple of things. First, the closer you get to the Lord Jesus, the more you are going to sense your own unworthiness. If you feel yourself to be more worthy than others, you may be on the outer circle, but you definitely are not in the inner circle. Second, the closer you get to the Lord Jesus, the closer relationship you are going to feel with others. If you are moving away from others, you must not be moving inward with the Lord Jesus. Love is the supreme evidence of one being on the inner circle --- not pride and arrogance.

## ***III. LIVING UP TO THE GOSPEL EMPHASIZES THE ATTRACTIVENESS OF THE GOSPEL.***

Can you imagine Peter trying to preach the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith in Christ to a Gentile congregation in Antioch after his actions? How many

would have listened to him? Who would have believed him when he declared that God saves Jew and Gentile alike through faith? Who would have believed him if he declared that being Jewish was no advantage? This explains the reaction of Paul to the behavior of Peter and the group. He knew that the integrity of the Christian message was at stake. So in a bold and personal manner, he confronted Peter publicly. He wanted the issue to be settled before the whole group so there could be no doubt about what was at stake. What we have in the remainder of this chapter may be a summary of the remarks that Paul delivered to Peter.

One of the things that explained the effectiveness of the ministry of Paul was that he practiced what he preached. He related to Gentiles on the basis of the principles of the Gospel.

If we are to ever get the ear of certain segments of our community, we must amend our behavior. They have not turned us off because of our message, but because our behavior does not match our message. We are not living according to our convictions. We have preached love, but have not loved. We have preached mercy, but have been unmerciful. We have preached generosity, but have been stingy. We have preached forgiveness, but have been unforgiving. When we say and do the same thing, we get a better hearing.

### ***CONCLUSION***

With whom do you find it easier to identify in this passage? Do you feel more like Peter or Paul? Probably most of us find it easier to identify with Peter. There is just really one basic difference between these two men in this incident. Peter was too much concerned about what certain men thought of his actions, while Paul was concerned only about what Jesus Christ thought. This does not mean that Paul was a more perfect human being, or a better Christian always, than Peter. Paul would have been the last to ever make such a claim. Rather it just means in this particular incident Paul excelled.

This is what we must do if we are to live by the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must determine in our hearts that we will boldly apply the principles of the Gospel to our lives, and especially to our relationships to others. These relationships are the most critical things in our lives.