

"I have been Crucified with Christ"

Galatians 2:1-21

Key Verse: 2:20

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

In lesson 1 we learned the core of the gospel and the uniqueness of the gospel. There is no other gospel except the gospel of Christ. In chapter 2 we can learn how to live by the truth of the gospel. Knowing the truth is one thing; living by the truth is another matter. It is hard to live by the truth in practical life. It requires discarding human prejudices and coming out of our comfort zone. Even Peter failed, as we will see in this passage. How can we live by the truth of the gospel in our homes, schools, workplaces, and every sphere of our lives? We are living in a postmodern era. Most people think everything is relative and feelings are most important. They say it is okay to be like a chameleon and change color according to the circumstance. Those who proclaim universal truth they are regarded as conceited and disruptive, and they are ostracized. How can we resist the trend of the world and live by the truth of the gospel? We learn from Paul in this passage.

I. To Preserve the Truth of the Gospel (1-10)

As we studied last time, after his conversion Paul went to Arabia for three years, most likely to study the Bible personally and deeply. Then he went to Jerusalem and met Peter and James briefly. Afterward he spent time in Syria--where Antioch was, and Cilicia--where his hometown Tarsus was. In 2:1-10 Paul tells of a second visit to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion. Scholars disagree about the nature of this visit. Some say it was to attend the Jerusalem Council (Ac 15). But the word "privately" (2) seems to preclude this. Moreover, the words "in response to a revelation" tell us that he was not summoned, but inspired by the Holy Spirit. Most likely this visit is the one mentioned in Acts 11:30 (12:25). While delivering a relief offering, Paul had a private audience with Jewish Christian leaders. In this part, we learn Paul's uncompromising attitude and the nature of the gospel.

First, Paul did not give in for a moment (1-5). In verses 1-5 Paul tells the Galatians how God helped him resolve a similar and previous crisis in the Antioch church. The gospel had worked mightily in Antioch in the hearts of Greek Gentiles. They became genuine Christians. Then some fake Christians invaded the fellowship. Paul exposed their motive (4). It was to make Gentile Christians "slaves" of Jewish legalism, robbing their God-given freedom in Christ. These fake Christians claimed the support of the Jerusalem church. So, young Gentile believers in

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Antioch were confused. They were wavering inwardly. Paul needed wisdom to help them. He must have prayed earnestly. Then he was inspired to visit Jerusalem. He brought Barnabas and Titus. He presented the gospel he preached to the Gentiles and put forth Titus as a fruit of his ministry. Titus was a genuine Greek. His changed life testified that the Gentile believers were being transformed into Christ's disciples apart from Jewish legalism. The Jerusalem leaders realized that Paul's message and ministry were the work of God and accepted Titus without compelling him to be circumcised. This set a precedent. In this way Paul defended the gospel and protected God's flock in Antioch. However, it was not easy.

Look at verse 5. "We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." There was severe pressure on Paul. There were sharp disputes between Paul and the circumcision group. Paul was misunderstood. He must have been branded as rebellious and unorthodox. However, he did not give in for a moment. Paul was not a stubborn and unyielding person. He was always ready to concede in cultural matters to win others over to Christ. We can see this in his dealing with Timothy. Timothy's mother was a Jewess, and his father a Greek. To Jewish thought, Timothy was a Jew. So Paul had him circumcised. It was not for salvation, but to honor his true Jewish identity. Paul did not try to make Gentiles into Jews, nor did he try to make Jews into Gentiles. Paul confessed in 1 Corinthians 9 that he became like the Jews to win the Jews, and like those not having the law to win them. Paul became all things to all people so that by all possible means he might save some (1 Cor 9:20-23). But in regards to preserving gospel faith, Paul was uncompromising--a courageous fighter.

Here we can learn from Paul. Generally we should concede in cultural matters. But in order to preserve the gospel and defend the faith of young Christians, we must not give in to enemies of the gospel even for a moment. We must fight for the gospel truth as a matter of life and death. Last year Franklin Graham said in regards to Muslims, "God loves them. I want them to know that they don't have to die in a car bomb, don't have to die in some kind of holy war to be accepted by God. But it's through faith in Jesus Christ and Christ alone." He also said that the Muslim religion enslaves people, especially women, with legalism. As a result, the U.S. Army rescinded his invitation to speak at the national day of prayer. It was a painful rejection. But Mr. Graham did not waver in his stand for the gospel truth. Likewise, we must clearly and courageously stand on the gospel amidst enemies.

Second, there is one gospel but different preachers and mission fields (6-10). The Jerusalem leaders added nothing to Paul's message. They did not say, "Your message was okay, but you are missing this main point." Or, "This part is irrelevant and unnecessary." Instead, they said, "Amen! What a beautiful, truthful

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gospel message." They confirmed that the gospel Paul preached was the same gospel they preached. Paul's gospel message must have revealed his deep understanding of the Gentiles and how the gospel to them. The Jerusalem leaders concluded that it was precisely God's work in him. They realized that God called Paul to preach to the Gentiles, just as he had called Peter to preach to the Jews. The same God was working in and through both of them. So they recognized Paul on par with Peter. They gave Paul the right hand of fellowship, publicly acknowledging him as God's servant with the true gospel message. They agreed to serve God in their respective mission fields as coworkers in the gospel. They made only one request of Paul--that he continue to remember the poor--the very thing he was eager to do.

Here we see that there is one gospel, but different preachers and mission fields. While the gospel that Paul preached was essentially the same as that of Peter, John and James, each one's way of expression and emphasis was different. We see this clearly even today, as we compare their written works. Their conversions, mission callings, educational backgrounds, life experiences, and personalities were all different. These distinctive factors affected how they presented the gospel. But it was the same gospel. The gospel can be expressed in different ways, while retaining its essential truth. The gospel may be compared to water in a jar. The jar can be small or large; it can be round, square or triangular. However the water inside the jar is still water. In the same way, the gospel is still the gospel, though it is preached by different people in different languages and nations.

When we hear mission reports from different nations, we find that the people of each nation are different. However, we also realize that the same God is working through the same gospel message in people of each nation. It is God who appoints and uses gospel workers in each mission field. So we are to regard as partners all whom God is using to preach the true gospel. We should accept them as brothers and sisters in Christ, embracing our diversity.

II. To Act in Line with the Truth of the Gospel (11-21)

In this part Paul continued to help the Galatians stand on gospel truth by telling how he courageously rebuked Peter. Then Paul shared his own personal testimony that reveals his secret to living by the truth of the gospel.

First, Paul rebuked Peter publicly (11-14). Peter and Paul both received God's forgiveness through Jesus Christ. They were men of God and they received the Holy Spirit. They received Jesus' calling as apostles and they influenced the early

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churches more than anyone else. The first half of the book of Acts records mainly what Peter did, and the second half what Paul did. However, when Paul was in Antioch he was a mere Bible teacher, whereas Peter was a pillar of the church, a direct successor of Jesus. Yet Paul rebuked Peter in public. Though it regarded eating fellowship, it was not a small matter.

Let's see how it happened. Peter went to Antioch, where Paul was preaching diligently. At first, Peter ate freely with Paul and the Gentiles. Eating fellowship is important to Jesus' people. It demonstrates acceptance and love. The Lord's Supper did not begin as a formalistic ceremony but as a fellowship meal to remember Jesus' death and confirm gospel faith together. Early Christians ate together with holy joy after worship service. In Acts 10, we find that the Lord had trained Peter through a vision of all kinds of clean and unclean animals to embrace the Gentiles, preach to them, and eat with them. This was not easy for Peter. He had to overcome deeply held prejudice against the Gentiles and to accept them as brothers. He had to learn to like Gentile food, which he had never eaten before. By the Lord's help, Peter overcame legalistic prejudice and accepted Gentiles from his heart. He could eat together with them with love and joy. This expressed his acceptance of them in a way that went beyond word. Here I remembered Dr. Samuel Lee. When he first came to America, he ate Korean food very deliciously in his home. One time he invited a young American man to his home for eating fellowship. The young man complained that the Korean food was smelly and not tasty. Dr. Lee did not get upset with the young man, but prayed about this. He realized that to eat with American young people in a meaningful way, he should learn to eat American food. He decided to like a most typical food at that time, the Big Mac. He ate one Big Mac and drank one Coke for lunch every day for eight years. American young people loved it.

Peter was doing well in eating together with the Gentiles in Antioch. However, when men from Jerusalem arrived, representing James, Peter's attitude changed. He drew back from the Gentiles and began to eat only with Jewish Christians. Paul says it was because he was afraid of the circumcision group. When Peter did this, even Barnabas was led astray to do the same thing. What did Paul do? Look at verse 14. "When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in front of them all, 'You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?'" Though he didn't intend to, Peter's actions made Gentiles feel that they were not worthy to eat with the Jews--as though they were second-class members of the Christian fellowship. To some, this may not have seemed like an important matter. But to Paul it was very serious. If Paul ignored this matter, young Gentile sheep

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would be discouraged. The church could have departed from the true gospel. The extensive influence of Antioch would spread to the smaller, scattered house churches and lead them into confusion. So Paul rebuked Peter in public. It was not easy for Paul to do this. However, it was unavoidable to protect gospel faith and for the sake of future generations.

Second, Paul's personal testimony of gospel faith (15-21). Paul was not emotional in his rebuke of Peter, but truthful and gospel-centered. He supported his words with his personal testimony. Look at verse 15. He reminded Peter of an inherent prejudice in the hearts of Jews toward Gentiles. The Jews considered the Gentiles "sinners." It was because they did not have the law and they did not care about the law. The Jews thought the Gentiles were like animals. However, Paul says, "We...know that a person is not justified by the works of the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ." He was speaking from experience. He knew that neither he, nor any other Jew, could keep the law. Their prejudice was actually groundless. The Jews were sinners just as much as the Gentiles. Both were destined to die, face God's judgment, and be thrown into the fiery lake of burning sulfur. The only way for both Jews and Gentiles to come to God was through the cross of Jesus.

In verse 16, Paul uses the word "justified." In origin, it was a legal term that means "not guilty." We use this word to express a sense of justice and rightness among people, such as "The ends don't justify the means," or, "Don't try to justify your laziness." But Paul uses the word "justified" in reference to God. God has the authority to justify a person. When God justifies a person, they are free from condemnation. In Hawthorne's classic, "The Scarlet Letter," an adulterous woman was condemned. She was cast out of church and her community. She was forbidden from talking with others and had to wear the letter "A" on her clothing when she went out in public. Like her, we were all condemned because of our sins. We were cut off from God, and suffered from guilt and shame. We were destined to die, face judgment, and go to eternal condemnation. Those under condemnation have no hope. Whether rich or poor, beautiful or homely, educated or ignorant, elite or outcast, they have the same destination. To be justified by God is not a small matter. It is a matter of eternal life rather than eternal death. How can we be justified by God? Is it possible by observing the law? Is it possible by human effort? No! Absolutely not! Those who fall into quicksand sink more quickly as they struggle to escape. The only way to get out is to receive help from someone else. While we were helpless, our merciful God provided a way out through Jesus Christ. Those who accept Christ are saved. God not only saves us from our desperate situation, he makes us his precious children. We can call God "Father, Daddy!" Our Father protects us, provides for us, disciplines us in love, and raises us in his image. Finally we will inherit God's kingdom. God gives this grace to

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anyone who trusts in Christ. God justifies sinners freely by his grace through faith in Christ alone. We can only thank God for his grace.

Here we can see the difference between how God sees people and how people tend to see themselves. People classify themselves according to human criteria, such as wealth, gender, social status, ethnicity, education, genealogy, nationality, and so on. They segregate themselves into classes. They are proud of their own class and despise others. However, God sees people differently. To God, all people are sinners. There are rich sinners, smart sinners, hardworking sinners, talkative sinners, athletic sinners, educated sinners, handsome or beautiful sinners, and so on. Commonly, all are destined to die for their sins and face eternal condemnation. God shows no favoritism based on human distinctions.

God is holy. In order to be justified by God we need to meet all the requirements of the law. It is impossible for us to do this by ourselves. Only Jesus could do so. Jesus offered himself to God as the perfect sacrifice on our behalf. Jesus paid it all through his death on the cross. God provided the way to be justified only through faith in Jesus Christ. So God recognizes only faith in Christ. God sees only two kinds of people: those who have faith in Christ and those who don't. Those who have faith in Christ are God's children and precious brothers and sisters. On this basis, they should love one another and have fellowship together.

In verses 17-21, Paul shares personal testimony to explain how he could live by the truth of the gospel. Verses 17-18 are not easy to grasp. Simply speaking, Paul is refuting criticism of the Judaizers. They claimed that believing Christ alone for salvation was dangerous, for it fatally weakened man's sense of moral responsibility. They assumed that people who believed in Jesus would use their freedom as a license to sin. In Romans 6:1 Paul presents their argument by saying, "Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase?" Because, "where sin increased, grace increased all the more" (Ro 5:20). As we listen to people's testimonies, we find that those who sinned greatly share the most gracious testimonies. So people think, "Oh! I need to sin a lot in order to receive much grace." Shall we commit sin in order to increase grace? Some people may say "Yes." But Paul says, "Absolutely not!" In verse 18, Paul explains that if we do this we become transgressors.

In verses 19-20, Paul explained why we cannot go on sinning after believing in Jesus. It is because Jesus changes us on the inside. We become a new creation. We die to the law, and the law cannot rule over us any longer. Instead we live for God.

Look at verse 20. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." Here we learn the secret of Paul's success in living by the truth of the gospel. It was not him, but Christ living in him. The same

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grace is available to us as well. When we accept Christ in faith, he comes into our hearts and unites himself with us. In a miracle of God's grace that is truly real though invisible, Christ's death becomes my death. Christ's burial becomes my burial. Christ's resurrection becomes my resurrection. Since we are united with Christ in this way, we no longer live, but Christ lives in us. Our old selves, that claimed the throne of our lives, have died. Christ now lives in us and has given us a new life. Christ is now the owner of our lives. While in the body, we live by faith in Christ, the Son of God, who loved us and gave himself for us. Romans 14:7-8 explains this well. It says, "For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord."

Verse 21 is the conclusion of Paul's testimony. If someone thinks that he can gain his salvation by his effort, he will nullify Christ's death and set aside the grace of God.

Today we have learned how to live by the truth of the gospel in an environment of conflict. We must overcome fear and stand on the truth of the gospel, for the gospel alone saves us from condemnation. We cannot do this by our own strength. But Christ can enable us to do this when he rules our hearts and lives. Christ loves us. His love drives out fear and empowers us to live by the truth (1 Jn 4:18). So let's come to Christ and accept his love. Let's pray for his power to enable us to live by the truth of the gospel.