

*“Gospelizing” the Faithfulness of Christ Among the Gentiles:  
A Study of the Letters to the Galatians and Thessalonians*

Diocese of West Texas

Spring & Fall 2010

Study and Reflection Session 3:

Living by the Faithfulness of Christ (Gal 2:1-21)

*A Translation for Study, with Commentary*

*Translation of Gal 2:1-2*

**Galatians 2:1** Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. **2** I went up in response to a revelation. Then I laid before them (though only in a private meeting with those who seem to be leaders) the gospel that I am proclaiming among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.

*Commentary on Gal 2:1-2*

**Paul responds to another revelation from God.** Paul continues his “autobiography” to emphasize the impact of another *divine revelation* for his life and ministry.

- He assures the Galatians that he was not *summoned* to Jerusalem by the leaders of the church because they disapproved of his Law-free gospel for Gentiles. Instead, it was *God* who inspired the visit.
- Paul realized that some of the Jewish followers of Jesus were effectively undermining his ministry by insisting that his Gentile converts become Law-observant Jews in order to become part of the people of God.

- So, God inspired Paul to go to Jerusalem to show the leaders of the church his evidence that God was truly at work through his ministry, empowering his Law-free gospel to the Gentiles.

*Translation of Gal 2:3-5*

**3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. 4 But because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might enslave us – 5 we did not submit to them even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might always remain with you.**

*Commentary on Gal 2:3-5*

**For Paul, the “truth of the gospel” does not require circumcision.** Paul highlights the fact that none of the Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem insisted that Paul’s Gentile colleague Titus undergo circumcision. Obviously, circumcision was not really a requirement for belonging to the people of God!

**So what is the truth of the gospel?** Clearly, Paul is referring here to something understood between himself and the Galatians. But it is less clear to us.

- Since it appears that the requirement of circumcision would undermine the truth of the gospel, one is left to wonder whether the truth, as Paul understands it, is that, in Christ, God is working to reconcile all people in one way of life that excludes no one. As you read the letter, you might consider how Paul would express the “truth of the gospel” if you could ask him.

**Who are the false brothers?** Paul mentions the “false brothers,” another pejorative reference to those Jewish followers of Jesus who draw different conclusions than Paul about what the “gospel” requires in terms of behavioral practice (see 1:6-9).

- As with the curse he invoked on them in 1:8-9, Paul’s disparaging and derisive language is rhetorically calculated to turn Paul’s readers in Galatia against these followers of Christ who insist on a different ethical pattern grounded in the Jewish Law.
- Paul presents himself as the uncompromising defender of “the truth of the gospel” so the Gentile males will not have to undergo circumcision and no one will be “enslaved” to the Jewish Law.
- From the point of view of the so-called “false brothers,” Paul is a dangerous radical who is clearly *disregarding scriptural mandates* of the Jewish Law.
- From Paul’s point of view, God has established in Christ an all-inclusive human community that includes Jews and Gentiles. Ironically, though, in the name of “the truth of the gospel,” Paul is effectively alienating and disregarding the more traditional Jewish followers of Jesus.

*Translation of Gal 2:6-10*

**6** And from those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – those leaders contributed nothing to me. **7** On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel for the circumcised **8** (for the one who worked through Peter making him an apostle to the circumcised also worked through me in sending me to the Gentiles), **9** and when James and Cephas and John, who were acknowledged pillars, recognized the grace [*charis*] that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of partnership, agreeing that we should go to the

**Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They asked only one thing, that we remember the poor, which was actually what I was eager to do.**

*Commentary on Gal 2:6-10*

**The leaders in Jerusalem approved Paul's Law-free gospel.**

Based on the evidence Paul presented, the Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem perceived that the power of God (*charis*, or "grace") was truly at work through Paul and his Law-free gospel to the Gentiles.

- The leaders did not ask Paul to change any aspect of his proclamation of the gospel.
- They concluded that God had truly entrusted Paul with this Law-free gospel!
- As we will see in the following verses, however, the terms of the so-called "partnership" agreement that Paul describes may not have been so clear to Peter and the other Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

*Translation of Gal 2:11-14*

**11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned; 12 for until certain people came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But after they came, he drew back and separated himself for fear of the circumcision faction. 13 And the other Jews joined him in this hypocrisy, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not walking consistently with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"**

### *Commentary on 2:11-14*

**The “truth of the gospel” also includes Jews and Gentiles eating together.** Peter was sharing the Lord’s Supper with Paul and some of the Gentile-Christians in Antioch. Like Paul, Peter was thereby “living like a Gentile, (v. 14), disregarding the dietary and social restrictions of the Jewish Law set out in scripture. But, when some other Jewish-Christians arrived from the Jerusalem church, Peter withdrew from table fellowship with the Gentile-Christians.

- According to Paul’s interpretation of the events, Peter was intimidated by these representatives of the Jerusalem church.
- From Paul’s point of view, Peter’s actions constituted hypocrisy, and they condemned Peter in the eyes of God, because his actions did not reflect the “truth of the gospel” that Jews and Gentiles eat together at the Lord’s table.
- Paul concludes that Peter and these other Jewish-Christians are defying the “truth of the gospel” by following the Law and *separating* these two distinct groups of Christians; they are effectively forcing the Gentiles to become Law-observant Jews to be part of God’s people.
- Paul argues for the opposite: as with Paul, the other Jewish-Christians must live like Gentiles to preserve the unity of God’s new, inclusive people who eat and socialize together.

#### **Galatians, do not be intimidated like Peter!**

It is unlikely Peter would have agreed with Paul’s characterization of the events in Antioch. But Paul was not concerned with giving a balanced account of the events. Rather, he was writing to persuade the Galatians that the teaching of the Jewish-Christians does not conform to the “truth of the gospel.” Gentiles are included in God’s people without regard to circumcision and observance of the Jewish Law. Unlike Peter, the Galatians must resist the pressure and intimidation of the Jewish-Christians.

*Translation of 2:15-16*

**15 We ourselves are Jews by birth and not Gentile sinners; 16 yet we know that a person is justified [*dikaioō*] not from works of the Law but through the faith of Jesus Christ [*pistis Iēsou Christou*]. Even we have believed into [*pisteuō eis*] Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified [*dikaioō*] from the faith of Christ [*pistis Christou*], and not from works of the Law, because all flesh will not be justified [*dikaioō*] from works of the Law.**

*Commentary on 2:15-16*

**God puts all people into right relationship through “the faith of Christ.”** For Paul, being “justified” [see the repeated use of the Greek verb, *dikaioō*] means being in right relationship with God and with other people.

- God justifies us in order to empower us for faithful living.
- This empowerment by God can truly change the world, in all the places where we live and work.

**Following the Jewish Law divides Jews and Gentiles.** Paul has already shown us how following the Jewish Law *divides* Jews and Gentiles rather than uniting them.

- Thus, concludes Paul, “all flesh” (that is to say, Jews *and* Gentiles) is not “justified” through observance of the Law (v. 16).
- According to Paul, Jews and Gentiles are put into right relationship with one another and with God through a single standard of faith and faithfulness established by the life and death of Jesus of Nazareth.
- Paul calls this “the faith of Jesus Christ” (*pistis Iēsou Christou*).

**Christ's own faith and faithfulness.** Gal 2:16 is one of the places in Paul's letters where he speaks of Christ's *own* faith and faithfulness (see Rom 3:22, 26; Gal 2:20; Gal 3:22; Phil 3:9; see also Eph 3:12).

- The King James Bible (1611) translates the ambiguous phrase *pistis Iēsou Christou* as "the faith of Jesus Christ."
- Most English-language Bibles since 1611 have translated that same Greek phrase as "faith in Christ."
- Part of the argument revolves around the technicalities of Greek grammar, which we will not review here.

**Does the translation of *pistis Iēsou Christou* really make a difference?**

- On the one hand, having faith *in* Christ is up to the individual believer. It means that one is justified by one's own belief, trust or confidence *in* the person of Christ.
- On the other hand, to be justified by the faith *of* Christ means that God puts *all* people into right relationship with God and each other when they live by the single standard of faith and faithfulness, demonstrated by the person of Jesus Christ and affirmed when God raised Christ from the dead.
- We think the translation "the faith of Christ" more accurately characterizes Paul's understanding of what God was doing in the person of Jesus Christ, setting an example for how to live faithfully in a way that unites all people. [Remember also our earlier discussion in Session 2, concerning the *single* Greek concept of faith and faithfulness, belief and action. That conversation will continue in the very next section below.]
- In Philippians 2:5-11, Paul provides a thumbnail sketch of his understanding of this same pattern of Jesus' faithful obedience to God. In those verses, the one who had all power and status relinquished it to take the form of a human slave, serving others, and for that reason God raised him to glory.

To “believe into” Christ means to have confidence in him and to act faithfully by following him. In Gal 2:16 Paul says that “even we” (he and Peter) “believed into” (*pisteuō eis*) Christ Jesus.

### PISTIS & PISTEUŌ

In Greek the verb *pisteuō* has the same root (*pist-*) as *pistis* (“faith” or “faithfulness”).

- The Greek word-group *pist-* was closely linked with the art of rhetoric, or public persuasion. The rhetorical goal of a public speaker was to persuade his or her hearers of something.
- The one who “believes” is the one persuaded by ever-mounting evidence of various types.
- The one who “believes” develops confidence in what the speaker is advocating.
- This confidence (or “faith”, “trust”, or “belief”) is “*pistis*.” Further, when you “believe” – when you are confident that something is true – you necessarily *act* upon that confidence.
- The Greek language does not distinguish between *faith* and *faithfulness*, between having confidence and acting in accordance with that confidence.
- Thus, while we have consistently translated *pistis* as “faith,” referring to Christ’s confidence and trust in God, the word *pistis* also includes the aspect of Christ’s faithfulness in action, reflecting his trust and confidence in God. So, we regularly refer to both the “faith” and the “faithfulness” of Christ.

**The faith of Christ and the faith of the believer.** Gal 2:16 highlights the key to Paul’s use of the *pist-* family of words:

- There is a parallel established between the *pistis* (the faith and faithfulness) of Jesus and the *pistis* of his followers.

- For Paul, to be a believer was inextricably bound up in our modeling a faith and faithfulness to God like that of Jesus, in our own contexts.

**Believing “into” Christ.** The strange-sounding phrase – to “believe into” Christ – uses the preposition *eis*, which reflects a movement into something.

- Paul seems to be saying that he has moved into a union with Christ by having confidence in, and trusting, Christ’s pattern of faith and faithfulness and by trying to imitate or participate in that same pattern in all the contexts of his own daily living.

**What does this all mean for us today?** The question, then, for each of us is: how do we live by the standard of the faith and faithfulness of Jesus Christ in our own time and place?

- What does it look like in my family? at my place of work? in my neighborhood? in my congregation? in my diocese? or even in the wider church?
- What is clear from the corresponding passage from Philippians (2:5-11) is this: *whoever is in the most powerful position is the one called to serve others.*

*Translation of 2:17-21*

**17 But if, seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have been found to be sinners, is Christ then a servant of sin? Certainly not! 18 But if I build up again the very things that I once tore down, then I demonstrate that I am a transgressor. 19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. I have been crucified with Christ; 20 and it is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by the faith [*pistis*] of the son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. 21 I do not nullify the power [*charis*] of God; for if justice comes through the Law, then Christ died for nothing.**

### *Commentary on 2:17-21*

**Is Paul a sinner? Is Christ a servant of sin?** Paul's teaching and his actions make him a "sinner" under the Law, but this does not make Christ a servant of sin!

- Because Paul continues to eat and socialize with Gentile-Christians, he has been rightly branded a "sinner" according to the provisions of the Jewish Law.
- But, according to Paul's interpretation, this does *not* make Christ a "servant of sin." Why not?
- The Law no longer defines "sin," at least in the context of relationships between Jews and Gentiles.
- Under the new standard for behavior ("the faith of Jesus Christ"), Paul becomes a transgressor only if he "builds up again" the dividing walls of the Law that segregate Jews from Gentiles, as Peter caused to happen in Antioch.

**Paul now identifies himself with Christ in every way.** Metaphorically speaking, "through the Law" Paul "died to the Law," having been "crucified with Christ" (v. 19).

- Paul's reasoning here is somewhat ambiguous, but his later argument in Gal 3:10-13 may offer a clue to what he means.
- In Gal 3:10 he argues that anyone who fails to keep the entire Law is "under a curse," including Christ himself, who became a "curse" under the Law when he was crucified on a tree (Gal 3:13, quoting Deut 21:23). By raising this "cursed" Messiah from the dead, God has shown that the Law is not infallible and does not have the final word.
- Paul, too, is now "under a curse" from the Law, since he disobeys the Law by eating and socializing with the Gentile followers of Jesus. But these actions place him in union with Jesus Christ, the one who died accursed under the Law.
- The metaphorical language about dying to the Law in 2:19 is Paul's way of saying that the provisions of the Law no longer shape all his actions.

**Paul now lives in complete union with Jesus Christ.** Just as the risen Christ was revealed “in” Paul at the time of his transformation (Gal 1:16, see Session 2), the risen Christ now lives fully “in” Paul: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me.”

- The life he now lives “in the flesh” (a phrase simply describing daily life in this world) is no longer lived according to the provisions of the Jewish Law.
- Instead, Paul now lives by the new standard of behavior revealed in “the faith of Jesus Christ,” the “son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- With this latter phrase, Paul offers a bit more definition to Christ’s pattern of “faith” and “faithfulness” by which Paul now lives.
- Just as the example of Christ’s own life reflects, Paul’s life of “faith” and “faithfulness” is lived in love and self-giving *for others*.

**Paul acts only in ways that cooperate with the life-giving power of God.** In Gal 2:21 we finally hear Paul’s logic that has undergirded this entire section of the letter. He alludes to the division and conflict he experienced through Peter’s conduct in Antioch.

- The power of God can be thwarted by Law-observant behavior that divides Jews and Gentiles.
- Paul refuses to engage in such conduct. Through his union with Christ, living according to “the faith of Jesus Christ,” he cooperates with the life-giving power of God.

**Paul refuses to follow the Law when it nullifies God’s power.  
By implication, neither should the Galatians!**

**God's justice.** God's justice is not embodied in the Law, but in Christ's resurrection through the power of God. Once again, we get an insight into Paul's reasoning:

- Under the Law, Jesus died accursed because he was hung on a tree (see Gal 3:10-13). From Paul's point of view, this reflects the *Law's* justice.
- Yet God raised the "accursed" but "faithful" and obedient Christ from the dead.
- By doing so, God demonstrated *God's* justice. God honored Christ's "faith" and "faithfulness" by raising him to new and eternal life (see also Phil 2:9-11).

### *Questions for Reflection*

1. For Paul, the "truth of the gospel" did not require circumcision for male Gentiles and did not require the enforcement of the Jewish food laws or restrictions against socializing with Gentiles. As we have seen, not everyone agreed with him. Are there certain things you consider to be essential to "the truth of gospel" today? Are there people who disagree with you? What do you think Galatians has to say to you about this dilemma?
2. As we noted above, in his ministry to the Gentiles, Paul changed his relationship to certain scriptural mandates contained in the Jewish Law. He made this change based on his interpretation of what God was now doing in the world. What was the overarching "good" Paul sought to accomplish by not insisting on circumcision for males, and by eating with Gentiles? What, as far as you can tell, guided Paul to make such a change?

3. Does Paul's journey to Jerusalem to discuss the content of his gospel suggest anything about how local, regional, or international groups of churches might address disagreements today concerning Christian practice? Did the agreement reached in Jerusalem between Paul and the leaders of the church *resolve* the dispute over what constitutes "the truth of the gospel"? What do the events described in Gal 2:1-14 suggest to you about how we should engage debates about "the truth of the gospel" today? Over time, how did the Church come to a sense of the "truth of the gospel"?
4. In your own words, describe the connection between having "faith" (understood as "confidence," "trust," or "belief") and acting "faithfully."
5. Describe a recent event illustrating "the faith of Jesus Christ." Can you provide a story from the Gospels to support your conclusion that the action reflects "the faith of Jesus Christ"?
6. Can you tell a story about a time recently when you were aware that "it is no longer I who live, but Christ living in me"? How did you know it was *Christ* alive in you? Does such an experience happen out of the blue, or do you have certain patterns of life that encourage the life of Christ in you?