

## OPENING ILLUSTRATION

- › After Jean Valjean escapes from prison in Victor Hugo's novel *Les Misérables*, he goes from inn to inn seeking shelter, but no one will take him in because of his yellow passport, which marks him as a prisoner. Finally, a kind bishop takes him in. In the middle of the night, though, Valjean steals the bishop's silver and runs away, only to be captured by the police and taken back to the benevolent bishop. When the police tell the bishop that Valjean had stolen his silver, the bishop tells the police that he gave the silver to Valjean; Valjean didn't steal it. After the police leave, the bishop tells Valjean that his life has been spared for God. Because of the grace he is shown, Valjean devoted himself to God. Like Valjean, we have been shown great grace. We were under a death sentence, but God loves us so much that He sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sin. Out of the overflow of the love shown to us, we love God and love others. In Galatians 2, we read of an incident where the apostle Peter had lost sight of his true identity and was acting hypocritically. If we're not receiving our identity from Christ, we're bound to look for it in other places, often in the opinions of others.

## CONTEXT

- › Earlier in chapter 2, Paul said that God doesn't show favoritism. In light of that, he said he wasn't concerned with who's popular or influential; he's concerned with upholding the gospel and the freedom it brings. In the second half of the chapter, Paul tells of an incident in Antioch when he confronted the apostle Peter for hypocritically eating with Jewish brothers when he had previously eaten with the Gentile Christians there. The issue was whether the Gentiles needed to keep the Jewish food laws like their Jewish brothers were doing. Like with circumcision, Paul says that the Gentiles did not have to adhere to the law. Doing so out of obligation actually went against the gospel. In the rest of the chapter he explains how Christians are justified (made right with God) by faith, and not by works of the law. This is the very heart of the gospel, and the doctrine upon which, many believe, the church rises or falls.

## EXPOSITORY OUTLINE

The following are suggested sermon points for each verse or section of verses for a large group setting.

- › Galatians 2:11-14. *The gospel stands against legalism and the hypocrisy it produces.* Legalism is a seductive departure from the gospel, promising a measure of control and puffing up human pride in religious accomplishment. It amounts to adding something other than Christ crucified to what's required to be forgiven and accepted by God. It thrives with peer pressure.
- › Galatians 2:15-16. *No one is justified by works of the law.* Trying to please God through religious performance or by belonging to a particular group is a dead-end street. Being a Jew doesn't make people right with God, and being a Gentile doesn't make it impossible to be right with God. Everyone is justified by faith alone.
- › Galatians 2:17-21. *The gospel enables us to truly live for God.* When we "get" the gospel, we desire to obey God not out of fear of punishment but out of gratitude. We understand that God loves us and died for us. The experience of grace produces obedience from the heart. Imperfect obedience, to be sure, but a natural, joyful, growing obedience nonetheless.

## GROUP DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each verse or section of verses for leading a small group session are also useful in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

### ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 2:11-14.

- › **What was Peter doing that Paul said was hypocritical? What do think caused Peter to forget the gospel? In what ways are you tempted to give in to peer pressure?**
- › **What role does fear play in Peter's faithfulness? How did it affect Barnabas? How does fear affect your faithfulness? Are there**





areas where you're tempted to compromise to fit in the with the crowd?

- › Paul confronted Peter, which took love and courage. How can we confront others about their sin in a way that isn't prideful or condemning?

#### ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 2:15-16.

- › Paul says that when it comes to getting right with God, it doesn't really matter if you're a Jew or a Gentile. Attempting to keep the law won't help you either. It's by faith that we're justified. How are you tempted to find your righteousness and value in belonging to a particular group, or by doing certain things?
- › Why do you think God chooses to justify people by faith rather than by some other means?

#### ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 2:17-21.

- › Seeking to be justified by faith is an admission that we're sinners and can't be good enough to satisfy God's holy standard of perfect obedience. How does an honest assessment of our condition take the pressure off?
- › Paul said that dying to the requirements of the law allowed him to truly live for God. Why is that? What's the dynamic at play?
- › What does it look like to "set aside the grace of God?"

## SESSION CONNECTION

- › In Session 4, students took a break from the Book of Joshua to read the story of the encounter Mary, the mother of Jesus, had with the angel Gabriel as recorded in Luke 1:26-38. Before Jesus was born, God sent the angel Gabriel to Mary to tell her who Jesus would be. He would be more than just a great man or great teacher, He would be the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Knowing who Jesus is essential because it is only when we know Him as He truly is that we will worship and obey Him as we truly should. Jesus is worthy of our full love and devotion because He is our Savior, God, and King. In Galatians 2, Paul says that he lives "by faith in the Son of God." Paul's union with Christ—he also says he has been "crucified with Christ"—shaped his identity, his mission, and everything else about him.

## OBJECT LESSON/APPLICATION

- › Ask students to think of some of the things they're most devoted to. What does devotion to something look like? Consider the devotion it takes to become a great athlete or a great musician, or a great anything. To achieve greatness requires a lot of blood, sweat, and tears. But notice something else about people who are truly great at something—they love the thing they're devoted to. Something about it has captured their heart, and they are willing to make sacrifices to pursue it, achieve it, grow in it, and to obtain it. Christianity appeals not only to our minds or our wills, but also to our desires. God's grace captures our hearts and we pursue Him not out of duty, but out of delight.

Jesus is worthy of full devotion—He is our Savior, God, and King.

- › <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/november/fox-news-highly-reluctant-jesus-follower-kirsten-powers.html>– Kristin Powers shares her unlikely journey of devoting her life fully to Christ.
- › <https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/scottysmith/2014/12/29/a-prayer-for-single-hearted-devotion-to-jesus/> – Scotty Smith encourages us in how to pray for single-hearted devotion to Christ.

\* These websites are not affiliated with LifeWay. Consult with your church's leadership before including these in your session to be sure that your church's values allow their materials to be referenced in your session time.