

PASSAGE – Galatians 2:1-10 NIV

¹ Then after fourteen years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. ² I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. ³ Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was Greek. ⁴ This matter arose because some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. ⁵ We did not give in to them from a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ As for those who were held in high esteem -- whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not show favoritism -- they added nothing to my message. ⁷ On the contrary, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. ⁸ For God, who was at work in Peter as an apostle to the circumcised, was also at work in me as an apostle to the Gentiles. ⁹ James, Cephas and John, those esteemed pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. ¹⁰ All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

OUTLINE:

In Galatians 2, Paul related that he went to Jerusalem for the second time since his conversion (1:18; 2:1; Acts 22:17) after spending 14 years preaching the gospel of the grace of God in Syria and Cilicia. He received this gospel from Christ—it was not a human invention, nor had it come from any human agency. At this time, some in Jerusalem who claimed to be converts to Christ tried to insist on circumcision for the Gentile believer, Titus, after the commandments of Moses. Circumcision was an important religious ceremony in the days of the Old Testament. It was the sign of the covenant between God and the Jewish nation. This action represented the “circumcision of the heart” or “consecration to God.” But Paul opposed this, maintaining that we are justified before God by faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by becoming slaves to religious ceremonies and traditions.

START (the group):

Icebreaker Question:

Follow up with your group regarding their applications from last week. Ask them how they did in applying last week's text.

STUDY (the passage):

Have everyone look back over the text. (Encourage everyone to be looking for something that sticks out to them, something they have a question about, and something God may be telling them to do.)

Questions 3 and 4 can cross similar answers so use as you feel led in your groups.

Ask questions about the text:

1. What sticks out to you from the passage? (Everyone answer)
2. What questions do you have from the text?
3. Why was it so significant that Titus (a non-Jew) was not required by the Jerusalem leaders to take on the Jewish mark of circumcision in 2:3-5? What are the implications for us today?
4. Paul says that the false teachers were threatening the "freedom we have in Christ Jesus" (2:4). In what ways does the gospel give us freedom that the normal earn-your-salvation-religion does not?
5. Why is it important to have accountability when we are sharing the gospel?
6. What is significant about the the urging to "remember the poor" by both Paul and the other apostles in verse 10?

APPLY:

7. Everyone is called to share the gospel, and in this passage we see that Paul is called to share with those outside of the Jewish culture and faith (Gentiles/uncircumcised) while Peter and the other apostles are called to the Jews (circumcised). Where in your life do you feel God is calling you to share the good news of Christ? (This may be simply by how you go about doing things or it may be a calling to be bold with you faith and share the gospel with someone in particular.)
8. If salvation comes from by grace through faith, why do we think that we have to "do something" to earn God's salvation and His pleasure?
9. What is one thing God is asking you to do in response to this passage? (One measurable goal)

PRAY AS A GROUP

Extra Material

The two main points of the passage are: (a) without anything “added” to faith in Christ, we are fully accepted by God. (b) Since this is so, we should, without anything added to faith in Christ, accept other Christians fully. At first glance, a reader might think that Paul went to Jerusalem because he was afraid he had been wrong in his message or method. That is impossible for several reasons. First, he says he went to Jerusalem because of a “revelation” from God (2:2). This shows that he was an apostle with direct access to God. It makes no sense for someone getting revelations from God to go and get authorization from someone else! Second, Paul had already stated in 1:12 that he had received the gospel from the very lips of the visible, risen Christ, and that in his initial receiving of the gospel he did “not consult any man, nor . . . see those who were apostles before I was” (1:16-17). Why would he consult such people now to confirm his message and mission when he did not do so then? Nothing was threatening Paul’s certainty, but something was threatening his fruitfulness. If the other apostles did not confirm him and repudiate the false teachers, it would be very hard for him to retain his converts. False teachers were telling his converts that Paul was preaching an inadequate gospel; it was not as full as the original apostolic gospel preached by the Jerusalem leaders. They insisted that Paul was too permissive, that the true gospel was “you are saved by both faith in Jesus and obedience to the law.” They insisted that Paul taught an “easy believism” that was only his own eccentric message.

Paul had brought Titus as a test case. Instead of allowing James, Peter, and John to talk in the abstract about accepting and eating with Christian Gentiles, Paul actually confronted them with a flesh-and-blood, uncircumcised, Greek Christian. By God’s grace, the Jerusalem apostles rose to the occasion and “walked the walk” rather than just “talking the talk.” They did not insist on Titus’s circumcision before having fellowship with him (2:3). It would be common knowledge that Titus had been received, and it was also a simple fact that he was uncircumcised. The Jerusalem apostles did not add anything, which means they agreed that it is faith in Christ alone—without any other performance or ritual—that is necessary for salvation. Titus’s acceptance by Jewish believers was a vivid illustration of the principle that an individual becomes spiritually “clean and acceptable” through Christ, and not through any deeds or rituals. A corporate implication is that Gentiles could become full members of the people of God without becoming Jewish in custom or culture. Membership in the people of God was now open to members of all cultures. So, on both the personal and corporate levels, Titus’s acceptance was a radical public statement of the implications of the gospel.

Paul was not afraid that he didn't have the true gospel or that the Jerusalem apostles didn't have the true gospel. What did he "fear" (v. 2)? Since the apostles were sinful human beings, it was possible that they might not be true to the gospel they had received from Christ. They might not stand up to the false teachers but allow them to make the claims they did because of their own cultural prejudices. This would have split the church in two, with neither side accepting the other fully, questioning if the others were saved! Think of it. Paul's Gentile churches would doubt that the Jewish churches really had faith in Christ and the Jewish churches would doubt the salvation of the Gentiles. That's why Paul says that the very "truth of the gospel" was at stake (v. 5) and in particular "the freedom we have in Christ" (v. 4). In other words, Paul's opponents were saying, "Not all Jewish persons are Christians, but all Christians must also be Jewish." Paul was saying that the gospel is for every culture. It was a brilliant move by Paul to come to Jerusalem, though frightening and risky. That is why Paul was afraid and why it took a revelation from God to get him to do it. If the Jerusalem apostles had not been as courageous and clear-headed as they were that day, the unity of the church would have been split. At such an early stage, virtually two different religions would have emerged.

The gospel leads to "cultural freedom." (v. 4) Almost always, moralistic religion presses its members to adopt very specific rules and regulations for dress and daily behavior. Why? If your salvation depends on obeying the rules, you want your rules very specific, do-able, and clear. You don't want "love your neighbor as yourself"—an impossibly high standard with endless implications! You want "don't go to movies" or "don't drink alcohol" or "don't eat this or that." Rules and regulations like this get into the area of daily cultural life. If the false teachers had had their way, an Italian or African could not become a Christian without becoming culturally Jewish. Christians would have to form little cultural "ghettoes" in every city. It would have led to far too much emphasis on external cultural separation rather than on internal distinctiveness of spirit, motive, outlook, and perspective. Elevating cultural propriety to the level of spiritual virtue would lead Christians to a slavish emphasis on being culturally "nice" and "proper," as well as to grossly intolerant and prejudiced attitudes. Also the gospel leads to "psychological-emotional" freedom. Anyone who believes that our relationship with God is based on keeping up moral behavior is on an endless treadmill of guilt and insecurity. As we know from Paul's letters, he did not "free" Gentile believers from the moral imperative of the Ten Commandments. Christians could not lie, steal, commit adultery, and so on. But though not "free" from the content of the moral law, Christians are free from the law as a system of salvation. We obey not in the fear and insecurity of hoping to earn our salvation, but in the freedom and security of knowing we are already saved in Christ. We obey in the freedom of gratitude.

The church in Jerusalem approved Paul's gospel. Paul took Titus, a Greek, as a living example of a Gentile who was saved by faith apart from the Law.

Legalism is, either, working according to our own power or according to our own rules and, ultimately, legalism is working to earn the favor of God thinking, that by doing certain things, that we are earning or meriting favor before God.

vv. 6-10 — The apostles accepted Paul's apostleship. "Fellowship" (v.9) is *koinonia*, one of the great words of the gospel and the highest expression of a personal relationship. It means sharing the things of Christ.