

# THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 2ND–3RD, 2024 // GALATIANS

## IN JERUSALEM (GALATIANS 2:1–10)

In this letter of correction and rebuke, Paul is re-establishing his credentials and authority to the Galatian Christians.

- The accusation of the Judaizers (false teachers) was that Paul was a renegade and rebellious teacher who was opposed to and independent from the apostles in Jerusalem.
- Paul is now going to show that his message was endorsed by the church leaders in Jerusalem.

## THE JERUSALEM COUNCIL (ACTS 15)

Some time after Paul and Barnabas returned to their home church in Antioch from their first missionary journey, there arose a great controversy.

- A group from Judea came to Antioch (probably the Judaizers) and began to teach that circumcision was necessary for salvation (vs. 4–5).
- In a church where half of the members were Gentiles, this was a problem!

It was a problem for the Jews because they found it hard to believe that someone could be saved and part of the family of God without accepting the obligations of the Jewish law.

- It was also an issue because there was the question of how Jewish Christians could have fellowship at a table with Gentiles who did not observe the law and were ritually unclean.

After Paul and Barnabas tried to sort out these issues with the group, the decision was made to take these matters before the apostles and elders at “headquarters” in Jerusalem, taking Titus along with them (vs. 1).

- Paul went to this council by the leading of the Spirit and went to know if the gospel he was preaching was true and he wasn't running in vain (vs. 2).

Titus (who was Gentile) came with Paul and Barnabas to the Jerusalem council as a test case to see if the Jerusalem leaders would allow a Gentile to be a Christian without first being circumcised.

- Even before the pillars of the church in Jerusalem—those who had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry—Titus was not compelled to be circumcised (vs. 3).

Not only did the leaders of the church of Jerusalem not compel Titus to be circumcised, they added nothing to Paul's message or ministry (vs. 6).

- They approved of Paul's truthfulness, theology, and saw God had entrusted him with the ministry of taking the gospel to the Gentiles, just as God was using Peter to take the gospel to the Jews (vs. 7).
- Peter and Paul had different ministry callings, but they were on the same team! (vs. 8)

The leaders of the church in Jerusalem recognized God's grace at work in Paul and gave him the “right hand of fellowship”—affirming both him and his ministry (vs. 9).

- Not every Christian, church, or ministry is going to look identical—there are different cultures, callings, and convictions—unity is not the same as uniformity.
- We are on the same team! Divisiveness is sinful.

Even though Paul's ministry to the Gentiles was going to look different than Peter's to the Jews, there was something very important that they both needed to have in common—ministry to the poor (vs. 10).

- Caring for the poor and needy is an essential part of Christian practice (Matt. 25:34–36, Lk. 14:1–14).
- When a Christian or church neglects this responsibility, this is a matter of disobedience.

## CONFRONTATION (GALATIANS 2:11–14)

Peter, one of the most important and influential leaders in the early church, approved of Paul's gospel and ministry when Paul came to Jerusalem.

- God even used Peter to share the gospel with and welcome Gentiles into the family of the Church (Acts 11:1–18).
- Yet, we read of Peter caving in and giving the appearance that he's siding with the legalists.

Even though Peter had affirmed the truth of the gospel of grace and was eating and fellowshiping with Gentiles, some Judaizers arrived, and Peter withdrew and separated himself from the Gentiles (vs. 12).

- Why? Because he “feared those from the circumcision party”—he was afraid of what they were going to think and say about him.
- This is a very common problem for Christians.

Legalists are scary—they operate using fear, shame, and guilt as spiritual bullies to try to motivate other Christians to follow their man-made standards for Christian practice.

- Anyone who refuses to be shamed or scared into submission is usually labeled (“worldly,” “rebellious,” “carnal,” “backslider,” “unsaved”).
- It's sometimes very difficult to stand up to a legalist and stay true to the message of the gospel.

Peter's cowardice and fear led to the other Jewish Christians (including Barnabas) joining him in standing with the Judaizers by ostracizing the Gentile believers (vs. 13).

- Paul saw this blatant hypocrisy and publicly confronted Peter (vs. 14). Paul was a bold man that wasn't into people pleasing!
- By eating with the Gentiles regularly, Peter was putting aside the Jewish law.

But when the legalist visitors showed up, to save face and avoid criticism, Peter acted as if he kept those laws all the time.

- This sent a message to the Gentile believers that unless they were Jewish, they weren't true Christians.
- To Paul, this struck right to the heart of the Christian gospel—we're not saved by keeping the Jewish law, we're saved by faith in Christ.

## STANDING UP TO LEGALISTS

Sometimes we are to abstain from certain activities or practices to be sensitive to a weaker believer's conscience (Rom. 14:1–12).

- We're not to purposefully offend or hurt others who may be in a different place spiritually.
- However, if we know the truth of the gospel and God's Word, we're not to allow ourselves to be bullied by those who try to add to it to condemn us.

## NOT BY THE LAW (GALATIANS 2:15–18)

Paul's message to Peter was that even though they were both Jews by birth (and not “Gentile sinners”), they both knew they weren't considered right with God before meeting Jesus (vs. 15).

- A person is not “justified” (made right with God) by the works of the law—if it is by the standard of the works of the law no human being anywhere on earth can be justified (vs. 16).

No one on earth can keep God's perfect law—so if it is by the law, no one can be saved!

- The law gives us the diagnosis, but it is not the cure: because of the law we know that we are sinners in need of salvation.
- We are “justified by faith in Christ” (vs. 16).

Justification by faith is the act of God where He declares the believing sinner righteous on the basis of the finished work of Christ on the cross.

When we trust Christ, God declares us righteous immediately and permanently.

- The heart of the “good news” (gospel) is that God puts the righteousness of Christ on our record in the place of our own sinfulness.
- Naysayers to this message of grace will argue that if people aren't obeying the law, then they'll just live by sin and make Christ a promoter of sin! Is this what the gospel of grace teaches? (vs. 17)

## “ABSOLUTELY NOT!”

The good news that Jesus has forgiven and covered our sins by His grace isn't a message that condones lawlessness and unholiness.

- Grace, rightly understood and received, leads to freedom from sin's slavery and to lovingly obeying God—not to a license to disobey God.
- A person who “rebuild[s]” the things that were torn down is a person who returns to the law (vs. 18).

If you rebuild what was torn down (i.e., return to the law to earn salvation, God's approval, or God's love), you're actually proving yourself to be a lawbreaker (vs. 18).

- Legalism and works-based salvation is actually a form of lawlessness and sin, because God has declared that we're saved by faith in Christ, not of ourselves and our works.
- *Is Christ's death and sacrifice enough?*

## CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST (GALATIANS 2:19–21)

Paul writes in vs. 19, “through the law I died to the law.”

- In Romans 7, Paul wrote that the “law” (God's righteous commands OR whatever standard you set to prove your worth and gain your acceptance) is only binding on a person when they're alive, but when you became a Christian, you died.
- Before you were in Christ, you were “married” to the law: it was how you established your identity, worth, and acceptance in the eyes of God, yourself and others (Romans 7:1–4).

But you “died”, and you're not under the law! What does it mean that, “through the law, we die to the law?” (vs. 19).

- The harder we try to learn the law (so that we can keep the law and prove that we are good and worthy people on our own), the more it will kill us spiritually.
- This explains why legalistic Christians and churches don't bear real spiritual fruit.

The law simply proves that without Jesus we're spiritually dead, and apart from Him we can do nothing (John 15:5).

- “I have been crucified with Christ”—we died to the law and our own self-centered, self-focused efforts to make ourselves righteous when Jesus died on the cross for us.
- Christ died in my place, so it was like me up on that cross; I've died to trying to “earn it” through the law.

Since I have been crucified with Christ, I now have a new and different life—my old life under the law is dead and gone.

- My new life is made possible through Christ living in me!
- This is the life of faith in Jesus, the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself for me.
- We can now live a life that pleases God because Christ lives in us!

Paul concludes this section by essentially saying that if humans could be made right with God by obeying the law, why would God send His son to suffer and die on the cross?

- If that were the case, Christ died for nothing (vs. 21).
- It's not that God's grace and Jesus' death “helped” us get to heaven and “helps” us live the Christian life—it's His work on our behalf that gets us to heaven and empowers us to live the Christian life.

THE GOSPEL DIVIDES, AND THE GOSPEL UNITES

- True Christian unity isn't possible when there isn't an agreement on what the gospel is and how we're made right with God through Jesus.
- But if there's an agreement on what the gospel is and how we're made right with God through Jesus, we're never called to divide Christ's bride over secondary issues or personal convictions.
- Agree on the gospel, avoid stupid debates.

## THE GOSPEL DIVIDES, AND THE GOSPEL UNITES

- True Christian unity isn't possible when there isn't an agreement on what the gospel is and how we're made right with God through Jesus.
- But if there's an agreement on what the gospel is and how we're made right with God through Jesus, we're never called to divide Christ's bride over secondary issues or personal convictions.
- Agree on the gospel, avoid stupid debates.

AGREE ON THE GOSPEL, AVOID STUPID DEBATES

## SPIRITUAL BULLIES

- A spiritual bully is someone who uses fear, shame, guilt, and name-calling (“rebellious,” “backslider,” “carnal,” “unsaved”) to try and motivate other Christians to follow their man-made standards for Christian practice.
- We must beware of becoming a spiritual bully.
- If we know the truth of the gospel and God's Word, we can stand up to spiritual bullies.

WE MUST BEWARE OF BECOMING A SPIRITUAL BULLY

## DEAD TO THE LAW, ALIVE BY FAITH IN CHRIST

- The old way of living—of trying to earn salvation, God's love and approval, or our sense of worth—is dead and gone if you've trusted in Christ.
- You're invited to a new life of faith in Jesus, the Son of God, who loved you and gave Himself for you.
- But to have this new life, you've got to die first...are you ready to die to the old way?