

# Galatians - One True Gospel

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[ 0 : 00 ] This evening's reading is taken from Galatians chapter 2. In the Church Bibles, that's on page 1168.

Galatians chapter 2 and reading from verse 1. Page 1168. Then after 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas.

I took Titus along also. I went in response to a revelation and, meeting privately with those esteemed as leaders, I presented to them the gospel that I had preached among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running, and had not been running, my race in vain. Thank you. Yet, not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. 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. We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

[ 1 : 41 ] As to 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.

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.

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. James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.

They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along.

Amen. Well, good evening. Thanks, Alan, for leading and Graham for reading. A big warm welcome to you. My name is James, and I'm on the staff team here at St. Silas.

[ 2 : 53 ] And it's a good evening tonight. I hope you're feeling that, because it's our joy tonight to look at, briefly, one of the most important passages that is in the Bible.

But before we dive into it, let me pray for us as we begin. So, Father, we come to you tonight in humility that you gave your one and only Son for us, that he died for our sins to rescue us out of the present evil age, that you gave us your Holy Spirit, a spirit of adoption, and you have united us all in Christ as a new creation.

Please make your word live in us tonight, that we may respond to it rightly. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Well, I wonder, as important as this passage is, I wonder, as you're going through it, you might have thought, how on earth could this be of any relevance to me?

So, it starts with Paul, and we've looked at him a bit, and he goes up to Jerusalem, because he's had a revelation. And, well, we expect that, because it's the Bible. And then there's a lot of talk about those who are esteemed, and pillars, whoever they may be.

And then there's someone wanting to circumcise Titus, and that seems a bit unfair. And then there's this bit about spies and freedom, and it's gone all James Bondy there.

[ 4 : 15 ] And then a handshaking, clearly written pre-pandemic. And then more stuff about circumcision and Gentiles, and that just seems weird. And then there's a nice bit about remembering the poor at the end of the passage.

And so you might be forgiven if you're sitting here thinking, how on earth is this passage going to be of any relevance to me in 21st century in the west end of Glasgow at all?

Just look down at what Paul says at the end of verse 5 in this passage. So that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

And so what we're reading about in this passage is about one of the key moments in gospel history, about how Paul's gospel was preserved for you and I, for us here this evening, tonight.

Just by way of context, the context so far is that Paul is an apostle, and he's writing to a church in Galatia, what is today southern Turkey. And they have been tricked by false teachers into believing a different gospel from the one that Paul has preached to them.

[ 5 : 35 ] And they have been tricked into giving up on Paul and on his gospel. And what we've seen over the last few evenings here at St. Silas is that Paul's gospel has come directly from God and not from men.

And this week, we're going to see that Paul's gospel, instead of being corrupted, is identical to that of the first apostles, the Jerusalem apostles.

And so Paul, to prove that his gospel was independent of the apostles, and that his gospel was directly from God and not from men, last week he stressed that he had only paid one visit to Jerusalem in the years immediately after his conversion.

But tonight, to prove that his gospel was identical to the Jerusalem apostles' gospel, he explains that he did a second trip to Jerusalem, 14 years later, where his gospel was endorsed and approved by them.

So it's identical to the gospel of the apostles. And what we're going to do is we're going to work through this passage, and I've got some points for us. You should find them, the half of them on the outline sheets.

[ 6 : 52 ] We're going to look at Paul's fear, that his efforts will come to nothing. Then we're going to look at Paul's gamble. He takes along Titus the test case. Then we're going to look at Paul's verdict.

He's totally vindicated. And then we're going to look at Paul's outcome, the right hand of fellowship. So firstly, Paul's fear that his efforts will come to nothing.

And the context from verse 1 and 2 is that Paul has described how he went up to Jerusalem 14 years later, perhaps 14 or 17 years after his conversion, after he met the risen Lord Jesus.

And as he goes, he meets privately with those who are esteemed as leaders, that is, the Jerusalem apostles. And he presents to them his gospel that he was preaching among the Gentiles.

And the reason that he does this, he gives at the end of verse 2, that I wanted to be sure that I was not running or had not been running my race in vain.

[ 7 : 56 ] You see, Paul's fear here is not that he's got the gospel wrong or that he's been telling a big fib all this time and that he's going to them to get the marking memorandum to check his gospel and get the correct answers.

No, he'd been preaching his gospel for 14 years already. He was absolutely sure and certain of his gospel that it came from God directly.

But rather, it's not that his gospel is under threat, but his efforts as a preacher of the gospel and an apostle of the gospel were in danger.

You see, the false teachers, they had said that Paul is a second-rate apostle. He's got a trumped-up, made-up authority. And that is, gospel was a cheap knockoff.

It wasn't the real deal and it was customized to appeal to a wider audience. And they were saying his gospel is like when you go to a flea market and you find that unbelievably too good bargain, that big-name brand, and it's a fraction of the price.

[ 9 : 08 ] But when you look at it more closely, you discover that instead of being an expensive watch, it is a cheap knockoff. It's like going to, expecting to get KFC and you end up going to KFG.

Or, it's like when you go to buy Microsoft Windows and you get bimbos instead. Or, here's another one I found, when you go to get Dolce & Gabbana, big label, and you end up getting Dolce & Banana.

And so what they were saying was that his gospel was inauthentic and worthless. And it was this rumor that Paul wanted to stop dead in its tracks.

He wanted to establish that there's one true gospel and that he preaches it. And that the Jerusalem apostles agree with him on it. And so he goes up to Jerusalem, not because he's been summoned by them to give an account, but rather in response to a revelation from God.

And just note, throughout this passage, he refers to the Jerusalem apostles as those esteemed, as pillars of the gospels, those who were reputed to be something.

[ 10 : 24 ] And it's not that he's being disrespectful to them, but rather that he doesn't want to say that they are more of apostles than he is. He wanted to claim an equality with them.

His apostleship wasn't any inferior to theirs. And just notice, as Jesus revealed himself to him and commissioned him to preach the gospel, so Jesus reveals and sends him to Jerusalem.

Not so that Paul could defend his own reputation, but so that he might stand for the truth of the gospel. So Paul's fear, fear that his efforts might come to nothing.

Let's look at his gamble. And I've had Kenny Rogers' song, The Gambler, in my head the whole week. So Paul's gamble, he takes along Titus, the test case.

And so the stakes are high here. If the Jerusalem apostles backed his gospel, then the false teachers, well, they wouldn't have a leg to stand on. However, if the Jerusalem apostles didn't endorse his gospel, or if they lost heart and lost their nerve, and forced Paul to compromise, then that would be a major setback for the truth of the gospel.

[ 11 : 46 ] And so to force the issue, to determine what is the real gospel, and so that all may know, Paul takes along Titus, the test case.

And Titus, he was one of Paul's acolytes. He was a guy that followed Paul around, who he was trying to encourage to be a teacher of the gospel. And Titus was a Greek.

He was not a Jew. He was uncircumcised. And the question that was going to force the issue was whether the Jerusalem apostles would require Titus to be circumcised or not.

And the reason for this is that circumcision was at the center of the controversy. And so in Acts 15, verse 1, we get a taste of the approximate gospel that the false teachers were teaching.

This is perhaps what they said. Unless you were circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved. What they mean is circumcision is a bit like a wedding ring.

[ 12 : 54 ] Maybe you've been married. I got married a couple of months ago. It was brilliant. Best decision ever. And a wedding ring is a very small thing. And it's a sign of wedding vows and promises that you make.

So a couple of months ago I said to Sarah, I promise to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish, till death us do part.

When you put on the wedding ring and when you make those promises, you enter into a covenant. You make special promises to your spouse. And so when I got married, I entered into a whole new way of life.

My wardrobe changed. I've been introduced to heart arts. I'm not the biggest fan, but there you go. And apparently my choice in movies have changed as well.

Gone are Rambo one through five. That's no more. And similarly, circumcision was a sign. It was a shorthand for all the laws and the Ten Commandments that Moses gave God's people in the Old Testament and for trying to be right with God by paying those works, doing things to be right with God perfectly.

[ 14 : 13 ] And circumcision was a seal of a covenant between God's people and God that if they kept these laws, then God will be their God and they would be right with God on the basis of the things they do.

So the false teachers, they were saying faith in Jesus alone was not sufficient to be saved, but rather you needed to keep the Old Testament laws as well to be saved.

You needed to be circumcised as well. But the gospel that Paul preached was a gospel of grace. It was freedom. You were right with God, not on the basis of the things you do, but on the basis of Christ's death and on the cross for your sins.

That through his death you've been rescued out of the present evil age and you have been united with God's people and are made a new creation in Jesus through his Holy Spirit.

And that you received this simply on the basis of God's kindness, his grace. It was his great gift to you. And it's a new covenant.

[ 15 : 24 ] It's a new set of promises that God has given you. That someone who's right with God on the basis of has already been done for them, on the basis of what Christ has already done for them.

But being under circumcision or the old covenant, rather than bringing freedom, was like being a slave or in a household or like being an indentured slavery, like being a worker.

You've got to fulfill the dues of your contract. You had to perform. You've got to keep the rules or you were out. But under the new covenant, under the new promises, you were completely free.

The rules were not the things that you were right with God by. You were saved by grace, not your obedience, not your performance.

And you are God's child through his Holy Spirit. Nothing will change God's relationship to you. And the issue in Galatia is that the false teachers were denying that freedom they had in Christ.

[16:32] And instead, they were trying to make slaves, the Galatian slaves, to the law again through insisting on circumcision. So verse 4, we read, some false believers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves, to make us enslaved again.

And so Paul, rather than making a person more holy, this different gospel was rather no gospel at all. It was the anti-gospel. And the false teachers in Galatia were saying, yes, you needed faith in Jesus, but you also needed to be circumcised and keep all the laws of Moses to be saved. You needed Jesus plus circumcision. And so, you may have heard of, I think it's an obscure brand over here, Just Juice. So maybe you go down to the shops and you'll buy a carton of Just Juice, orange juice.

And Paul's gospel was Just Jesus. No additives, no extra bits needed. And Paul was saying that his gospel was, if it was a juice, if you added bits to it, those bits wouldn't make the juice taste any better.

They would only make the juice disappear. It would be worthless. It would be pointless. If you added things to Just Juice, you wouldn't get a better juice, but you would get no juice at all, whatsoever.

[18:02] And look at you guys tonight in the West End here. It's likely that not many of you are tempted to go off and get circumcised, is what I'm thinking.

But it might be that some of us here tonight are thinking that the way to be a better Christian or the way into being a Christian is, well, I need to sort my life out and then God will accept me.

Once I've sorted out my life, then God will accept me. Or we might be here tonight as someone who says, well, Jesus saves me, but if I want to be a super-duper Christian, then what I need is an ecstatic experience, a special extra dose of the Holy Spirit, and then I'll be a supercharged Christian.

Or maybe you might be here, one who's here tonight and you think I'm saved by being a Christian, but I still need to do my best every day before God will do the rest.

I still need to prove that I'm worthy to God for Him to accept me. Whereas the gospel is, God accepts you simply as you are.

[19:15] You don't have to bring anything. You don't have to do anything. It comes as a gift. God gives you His Holy Spirit and He makes you His child, a new creation. And so, Paul says that when we add things to the gospel, when we add the things we do, we're adding on to the gospel.

We don't get extra points. We get no points and are in danger of being out of the gospel, out of the game entirely. Notice also, it's not simply that the false teachers were insisting on Gentiles or non-Jewish folk in order, but notice also, it's not that the false teachers were also insisting that non-Jewish folk in order to be Christian, they had to become Jewish.

They had to take on Jewish habits in order to be full Christians. And so, we might be here tonight and think in order to be a good Christian, then you need to subscribe to a certain pattern of behavior or something like that.

Well, we've looked at Paul's fear that his efforts will come to nothing and we've considered Paul's gamble. He takes along Titus the test case, but let's look at thirdly, Paul's verdict, verses 6 to 9. He is totally vindicated. And like a true gambler, Paul's gamble pays off spectacularly. So just look down at verse 3. Titus is not compelled to be circumcised.

[20:53] No requirements is made for him to hold to the old covenant. He's not to be enslaved again. And unlike the false believers who wanted to add on to Paul's message, what did the Jerusalem apostles do?

Verse 6, they added nothing to my message. They recognize that there is one true gospel and the gospel is indistinguishable from others.

And then notice verse 7 and 8. They recognize Paul's authority as a gospel, as someone who has uniquely met the risen Lord Jesus and has been commissioned by Jesus to speak and preach his gospel to Gentiles on Jesus' behalf.

God who shows no favoritism, so the apostles do not show favoritism between the Jews and Gentiles, but rather they are eager that all people all over, irrespective of their background, their cultural background, might come under the sound of the gospel.

And as they have said, Paul is an apostle to the Gentiles and so they will go and be apostles to the circumcised. Well, let's look very briefly at Paul's outcome, verse 9 and 10.

[ 22 : 11 ] The right hand of fellowship. So just look at the outcome, just look down at verse 9 again. James, Cephas, and John, those esteemed as pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me.

And the Jerusalem apostles extended to Paul the right hand of fellowship. The right hand was the arm that you might carry a weapon in. And so what they're saying is they made themselves completely vulnerable to Paul and opened to him.

They hid nothing from him. They extended fellowship to him. They brought him into their confidence as an equal, as a trusted brother with whom they were completely united.

and in communion with. And they recognized the grace given to him. They affirmed the truth of Paul's gospel, that it was the gospel of grace and that God had done all the work on our behalf for our benefit as his children and not as our slave masters.

And then finally, verse 10, we see a worked example of gospel unity and of there being one true gospel for all believers, that we have one spirit of sonship within us that makes us God's children.

[ 23 : 30 ] So just look down at verse 10 there. All they asked that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I had been eager to do all along. And this verse here is probably a reference to the gift that the Gentile Christians in Galatia, that Paul was going to bring to the church in Jerusalem and to the Jewish Christians there, who, in response to a revelation of a famine that was given to a prophet Agabus that we read about in Acts 11, verse 27 to 30, which is probably the revelation that caused Paul to come up to Jerusalem in the first instance.

And so, lots of time, great fuss is made about gospel unity and in our reading tonight, we see that gospel unity is not underplayed. In Jesus, all people, tribes, tongues, and nations are called to worship Jesus and through faith in Jesus alone.

But at the same time, we don't see gospel unity overplayed, a uniting irrespective of what people think about Jesus, particularly among church leaders, simply because they self-identify as Christian.

And so, in summary, Paul's fear is that his efforts will come to nothing. Paul's gamble is that he takes along Titus the test case.

Paul's verdict, well, he's entirely vindicated. His gospel is given the seal of approval and is endorsed. And then Paul's outcome, he's given the right hand of fellowship from the Jerusalem apostles.

[ 25 : 10 ] Well, what are we to make of all this? What are we to make of this passage tonight? You may have come here and thought it was a bit irrelevant, and what are we to make of it then?

Well, firstly, I wonder if you spotted in verses 7, 8, and 9, three times Paul says that he is to go to the uncircumcised, and the Jerusalem apostles are to go to the circumcised.

And I think what he is doing here, he is stating that there is one true gospel, and that it is for all people, all over the world, circumcised, uncircumcised, is a shorthand for everyone.

It is to go out to all people. All people are to come under the sound of it. Everyone in Glasgow. Then secondly, in Titus we have a wonderful test case of the truth of the gospel being preserved for us.

That is, it is a truth for all people, and that is a truth which none of our efforts are to be added onto. We are saved by grace alone, through faith in Jesus alone, not through our efforts, not through adding bits onto the gospel.

[ 26 : 27 ] And so thirdly, sometimes it is fashionable for people to attack Paul and draw a line between Paul and the other apostles and Jesus. And in our reading, last week and tonight we see that it is impossible to do this.

There is one true gospel, Jesus' gospel given to all his apostles. And the truth is you can't get a cigarette paper between Paul and Jesus and the other apostles.

And so we saw that Paul has received his gospel directly from Jesus. And then last week we saw how Paul models his ministry on Jesus from Isaiah 49.

and now tonight we see how Paul meets Jesus' closest earthly friends, the Jerusalem apostles, and they give him the right hand of fellowship.

You cannot get a cigarette paper between Paul and the other apostles. And then the question then is will we listen to Paul? Or will we take him at his word?

[ 27 : 30 ] Will we believe and trust his gospel? Will we trust them believe the words that he has written to us? Even the awkward bits. Or will we be tempted to step back from them?

To be shy about them? Will we read his words? Will we listen to them? Will we think about this gospel? Will we delight in the joy and the grace and the freedom that we've been given in it? Or will we be tempted to step into slavery and try and earn our own salvation through our own works? Will we think on Paul's words?

Will we mull on them and apply them to our hearts and lives daily throughout this week and the years to come? Well let's pray now as we close.

So Father we thank you for the freedom that we have in Christ. We thank you that the truth of the gospel has been preserved for us.

[ 28 : 37 ] We thank you that we cannot get a cigarette paper between Paul and Jesus and the other apostles. We thank you that the gospel is a great gift that has been given to us for our joy and our salvation.

Please may we rejoice in it daily. Please may we seek to share it freely with our friends and neighbors wherever we may go. Please may we not think of people as being in different tribes but rather a united people as Christians as a united people who trust and believe in the Lord Jesus and have been given God's Holy Spirit.

In Jesus' name. Amen.