

A STUDY IN GALATIANS

Part 6 – “One Gospel”

Galatians 2:1-10

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After the birth of their first child, Calvin Coolidge's wife purchased a book titled "Our Family Physician" for \$8.00, no small sum in their day! She was quite afraid to tell her husband of the purchase both because of the high cost and the subject matter. She thought she had placed it in a safe place, away from her husband's normal routines. However, when she picked it up again several weeks later, she found the following handwritten inscription on the flyleaf: "don't see any recipes here for curing suckers. Calvin Coolidge!"

The Apostle Paul was certainly no "sucker." While the preaching of the Judaizers sounded good, he knew the destructive nature of their teaching for the Christian. [The question has always been: "How is a guilty sinner made just before God?"](#) Virtually since the beginning of the church there have been doctrinal battles fought over the answer to this question.

It may be helpful to understand a little history. This issue first became important in the church at Antioch. You will recall that this is the church where believers were first given the names "Christian," or "little-Christ's." It wasn't long until the debate was moved to Jerusalem for a final decision by the apostles. Luke includes the account of this discussion in Acts 15. Paul was there representing the Gentiles and the call he had received from the Lord to reach beyond Israel with the message of salvation through Christ and our text today is his account of the meeting.

Then after fourteen 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 preach among the Gentiles. I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain. 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. 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. 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. (Galatians 2:1-10 NIV).

Paul lays out his case for his apostleship while giving the reasons for his commitment to the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith. He wants the believers in Galatia to know that this message is the only message that has ever been acknowledged by the Christians as a whole as the true Gospel. The message being brought to them by the teachers from Judea is contrary to that which the Lord has given to His churches.

FIRST, WE SHOULD NOTE THE ANTOGONIST TO THE GOSPEL OF GRACE.

Antioch was an important church in the early history of the church. Barnabus was very influential early in this church and ultimately brought Paul in to assist him. Under their leadership the Lord blessed the church with phenomenal growth. As has often been played out in churches through the ages, their rapid growth brought some unique problems. These problems were exacerbated by some who claimed to be Jewish Christians after having been converted from their lives as Pharisees. Paul was also a Pharisee prior to his conversion, however these men were teaching a far different gospel!

The Judaizers (as they came to be known) taught that one could not become a Christian or be declared just before God until first they had been circumcised and observed the rituals that were important within the Jewish practice of worship. They preached a strict adherence to the Law. It is at this point the Lord instructed Paul to go to Jerusalem for a conference. He brought with him a Gentile Christian who had not been circumcised. His presence prompted an immediate response from the teachers who had been teaching a contradictory message from Paul. They began to insist on the circumcision of Titus. They wanted him to submit not only to Jesus in faith, but also to the Mosaic Law with all of its burdens of rituals. The antagonists were revealed very quickly. Their true motivation was soon revealed. There are some important things to note.

1. *First, they were declared "false brethren" (cf. v. 4).* This is an indication that they claimed to be Christian ministers and a part of the Christian brotherhood, but were, in fact, far from either! Paul accused them of purposeful deception. They were pseudo-Christians. They were far from genuine. **This is a clear warning to all of us today. Any teacher who garbles the message of how God justifies sinners is not a true Christian! He is a "false brother."** While we need to treat all men fairly with a brotherly kind of love, we need to be very careful who we accept as our "brothers in Christ." **The only basis for true Christian brotherhood is that men find righteousness before God by faith in Jesus Christ. It is not the things we do, but the One in whom we believe that makes us brothers and sisters in Christ.**
2. *They were deceptive in their methods.* The words used by Paul describing their activities make it very clear they were a deceptive group. Evidently they got into this meeting under some false pretense. We would do well to remember that this is ultimately the method of the devil and is repeated often in our day as well. These deceivers never make their true intentions known from the beginning. It is a stark contrast to the work of Christ who comes to us "in the Light." The Lord Jesus never deceives anyone, nor did he hide his identity or his purpose. He wanted everything to be known from the beginning.
3. *Their ultimate goal was bondage, not freedom.* They were bent upon the destruction of the liberty enjoyed by the Gentile Christians. They wanted them to become shackled with the rules and regulations of the rituals of the Old Testament Law. They were pressing on them the burden of keeping the laws for their salvation instead of faith in the finished work of Christ.

SECOND, WE SHOULD NOTE THE AGREEMENT ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF GRACE.

The outcome of the conference in Jerusalem is very important in the future of the church. In the public meeting of the church Paul and Barnabus rehearsed the work of God in their lives

with the church. They told of the many conversions and the signs which had accompanied their work in the Gentile community. It must have been a thrilling testimony. Following this Simon Peter recounted to the group how God had been with him concerning the Gentiles in Caesarea. He had been led to share the Gospel with the household of Cornelius, only to have the entire group respond with faith. God taught Peter the same principles that were confirmed with Paul and Barnabus. **The battle was won for the Gospel of Grace. Some important agreements were stated:**

1. **First, they agreed that a man can become a true Christian by faith in Christ alone.** This agreement was expressed when they welcomed the uncircumcised Titus into their fellowship as a true Christian. They did not insist on him being circumcised or observing any of the rituals of the old order. Rather, they agreed when he placed his faith in Christ as Lord and Savior, he had received a full and complete salvation from the Lord Jesus. **This has a significant impact on the common belief held today by some Christians concerning the "second blessing" and certain gifts of the Holy spirit being evidence of salvation.**
2. **Second, they agreed that they knew only one Gospel message – that of salvation by grace through faith.** And, that was the message that must be shared with all men. **It is interesting that Paul references "the right hand of fellowship." It was a public covenant made between two parties.**

This is an essential to the message of the Gospel. God has never given more than one message concerning salvation. This message declares that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary for our salvation through his death and resurrection, and that we receive the required righteousness as a gift when we place our faith in him, and in him alone. This is the message for men, women, boys and girls. There is no other message for anyone.

One of the great misunderstandings of our day is that only the very worst of people need the death of Christ upon the cross for their sins. Those who live relatively moral lives are able to somehow make it on their own merit. They are absolutely wrong! There is only one way for all men. That way is through the grace of God through faith in Christ.

TWO CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

1. **We need to be very careful about refusing Christian *fellowship* to some merely on the basis of externals.** A man is a Christian brother if he is trusting in Christ and Him alone for salvation. We must take care not to exclude others from our circle of fellowship based on their practice alone.
2. **Second, we have a message which demands our sharing it within our sphere of influence.** The Gospel is the message for our world, whatever the nature of our world. We need to make it known wherever we are, whenever we are there!

There were two people standing outside the store under the canopy waiting for the rain to stop. One was a little girl. She must have been 6 years old, this beautiful brown haired, freckled faced image of innocence. Her Mom looked like someone from the Walton's or a moment captured by Norman Rockwell. Not that she was old fashioned. Her brown hair was ear length with enough curl to appear natural. She had on a pair of tan shorts and light blue knit shirt. Her sneakers were white with a blue trim.

The other looked like a Mom. It was pouring outside. The kind of rain that gushes over the tops of rain gutters, so much in a hurry to hit the Earth it has no time to flow down the spout. Drains in the nearby parking lot were filled to capacity and some were blocked so that huge puddles formed around parked cars. We all stood there under the awning. We waited, some patiently, others aggravated because nature messed up their hurried day.

I am always mesmerized by rain fall. I get lost in the sound and sight of the heavens washing away the dirt and dust of the world. Her voice was so sweet as it broke the hypnotic trance we were all caught in. "Mom, let's run through the rain," she said. "What?" Mom asked. "Let's run through the rain!" She repeated. "No, honey. We'll wait until it slows down a bit," Mom replied. This young child waited about another minute and repeated her statement. "Mom. Let's run through the rain." "We'll get soaked if we do," Mom said. "No we won't, Mom. That's not what you said this morning," the young girl said as she tugged at her Mom's arm. "This morning? When did I say we could run through the rain and not get wet?" "Don't you remember? When you were talking to Daddy about his cancer, you said, "If God can get us through this, He can get us through anything!"

The entire crowd stopped dead silent. I swear you couldn't hear anything but the rain. We all stood silently. No one came or left in the next few minutes. Mom paused and thought for a moment about what she would say. Now some would laugh it off and scold her for being silly. Some might even ignore what was said. But this was a moment of affirmation in a young child's life, a time when innocent trust can be nurtured so that it will bloom into faith. "Honey, you are absolutely right. Let's run through the rain. If God lets us get wet, well maybe we just needed washing," Mom said. Then off they ran. We all stood watching, smiling and laughing as they darted past the cars and yes through the puddles. They held their shopping bags over their heads just in case. They got soaked. But they were followed by a few believers who screamed and laughed like children all the way to their cars, perhaps inspired by their faith and trust.

That's faith that saves!