

We have been studying the letter of Paul to the churches of Galatia. The churches had been recently started by Paul and Barnabas, but not long after, some Jewish Christians came to tell them they had to keep the laws of Moses and start with being circumcised. This threatened the very message of the grace of God through Christ for salvation that Paul had proclaimed to them. It was tempting them to trust in their own works for their salvation instead of the work of Christ on the cross (Titus 3:5ⁱ).

The attack from these false teachers included an attack on Paul's authority. Paul defended his message by sharing his testimony, and in today's passage he explains the authority given to him from God. He had in the previous chapter told them that what he taught was a revelation from God and that his calling was not from men but from Jesus Christ and God the Father (1:1ⁱⁱ). He explained that he was not trying to please men, but God who called him (1:10ⁱⁱⁱ). This message he proclaimed caused the Jews to persecute him and risked Roman persecution as well. He obviously wasn't preaching the message of grace to personally gain anything. It was his heart felt obligation because of the mercy and grace God had bestowed on him. He was more concerned about faithfully conveying that message than he was about being liked or even than his personal safety (Acts 20:24^{iv}).

June 29th is the day we remember the beheading of the Apostle Paul on the Appian Way near Rome. So, when we read this passage today, please remember this was not just a minor theological difference. This was the reason he lived and died. Jesus made it so real to him that he was willing to not only give his life, but to die to self every day that Christ might proclaim the gospel of grace through him (1 Corinthians 15:31^v).

The previous chapter concluded with Paul telling the story of his conversion from being the chief persecutor of Christians to proclaiming Jesus as Lord in the synagogues of Damascus and three years in the wilderness of Arabia reconsidering the meaning of the prophecies about the Messiah.

¹ *Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.* Galatians 2:1-10 Paul was converted not long after the ascension of Jesus, around A.D.33 to 35. When he says it was after fourteen years, he may have meant from the time of his conversion. Jews counted years including any part of a year. Fourteen years could be just twelve years and two months. We end up with this second meeting with apostles taking place sometime between A.D.47 to 49.

Barnabas had first introduced Paul to the apostles in Jerusalem after Paul's three years in Arabia (Acts 9:27^{vi}). He surely knew of Paul's gospel of grace and calling as an apostle to the Gentiles. Paul then went up to Cilicia by himself. Barnabas sought him out and brought him to Antioch to help with the ministry as many Greeks were coming to Christ. This meeting in Jerusalem may have taken place when Paul and Barnabas took support from the church of Antioch to the church in Jerusalem that was experiencing a famine (Acts 11:29,30^{vii}). Some commentators believe this was when Paul and Barnabas came to get an official decree from the church in Jerusalem in Acts 15 regarding the very same issue of whether Gentiles need to keep the laws of Moses. Either way, the issue is the same. Was salvation by grace alone or were works required.

They took Titus who was a converted Gentile as an example of their case for grace. He was an elder and later was even chosen to help appoint elders on Crete (Titus 1:5^{viii}). One of Paul's letters is written to him.

The Judaizers were bringing division. Paul desired unity and wanted the issue resolved. The church could have split into two groups. Either the Judaizers would be corrected by the apostles or Paul would be corrected. It was a tense moment. By telling of this secret meeting, Paul is clarifying to the Gentile believers in Galatia that the issue had already been resolved. Those who troubled them were out of order and not submitting to the doctrines of the apostles.

Something similar happens in our day. Christianity has a two-thousand-year history. The Bible has been studied in its original languages by many scholars. Though some teachings have different interpretations, its over-all meaning is clear. We call those essential doctrines orthodox Christianity. It is summed up in some of the Christian creeds. The Bible is the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16^{ix}). God sent Jesus, who is one with God (John 10:30^x), into the world to save sinners (John 3:16^{xi}). He was born of a virgin (Luke 1:34^{xii}), lived a sinless life (2 Corinthians 5:21^{xiii}), chose to do the Father's will by dying on a cross as the punishment for the sins of mankind (Matthew 20:28^{xiv}). He conquered death and hell and rose from death victorious (Revelation 1:18^{xv}). He ascended into heaven and was given all authority (Matthew 28:18^{xvi}). He will return to rule and reign on the earth (Isaiah 9:7^{xvii}). We receive the forgiveness He offers by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone (Ephesians 2:8,9^{xviii}). Teaching that emphasizes other things above these core tenants or that which negates any of these key points is considered heresy. Paul described the teaching of the false teachers as apostasy, a 180 degree shift away from the gospel. He felt it necessary to clarify the issue by presenting it to the lead apostles, Peter, John, and Jesus' brother James.

² *I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.* Galatians 2:2 Paul is telling his testimony of what took place because it countered the teaching of works that the Judaizers had been pushing. What do the leaders of the church have to say about Gentiles keeping the laws of Moses? Apparently, he had a revelation from God that this was the time to meet with the leaders to come to a common understanding. Jesus appeared to him numerous times in person, in dreams, and in visions (Acts 16:6-10^{xix}; 18:9^{xx}; 22:18-21^{xxi}; 27:23,24^{xxii}). Paul believed those who came from the Jerusalem church were undermining the gospel message by distorting the teaching of the apostles.

If the timing coincided with Acts 11:30, Paul was delivering a gift from the believers in Antioch during a time of inflated prices in Jerusalem. But Paul's main purpose was to privately check with those in authority to come to a common understanding of salvation being by grace alone. So even though he knew he was taught by the Scriptures and revelations from Jesus, he was making sure the apostles had the same understanding. If the Judaizers had the apostles' approval, it might negate the work he had done and split the church into two factions. I believe that is what he meant by running in vain. Obtaining a common understanding would keep the church united and eventually stop the demand for Gentiles to be circumcised to be counted as members of

the church (Romans 14:19^{xxiii}). If the Jewish Christian apostles sided with the legalists and insisted Gentiles needed to obey the law of Moses, Judaism would have been the grave of Christianity. Since the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit, we can thank God that was not the case.

As I write this, a guest told me they needed to talk to me because they see what is wrong with the church. In other words, they have more insight and hear from the Lord better than the elders. Maybe, but not likely. We always hear out these kinds of concerns and pray about them to see what the Lord's leading is. It is possible that the elders could grow complacent. But elders are chosen because of their consistent walk with the Lord and ability to teach God's Word.

God can only reveal His will to a heart that is humble and tender... God can only reveal His will in perplexities and special difficulties to a heart that has learned to obey and honor Him loyally in little things and in daily life^{xxiv}. Too often the prideful want to tell us to do things the way it was done in their previous church or according to their personal preferences. But God doesn't do the same thing in every city. There is no church formula other than to have godly men appointed as elders who seek the Lord's direction from the Word of God and prayer.

³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Galatians 2:3 It seems those who wanted to make Gentile converts more acceptable to Jews were insisting Titus should be circumcised. The apostles did not give in to their demand. Here was a Greek elder of the Antioch church in their midst whom they do not expect to follow Jewish traditions. That doesn't sound like a big deal to us, but before Pentecost, followers of Jesus would not even go into a Gentile home (Acts 10:28^{xxv}). To accept a Gentile as an elder representing a church was a big deal to these Jewish Christians.

Earlier in Jewish history, the Syrians had subjugated the Jews and tried to break down their devotion to their traditions by making circumcision illegal. Any baby who was found to be circumcised was executed along with his mother. This is one of the reasons for the Maccabean revolt. Circumcision was a sign of their inclusion into the covenant Abraham made with God. At one point in Jewish history, they even thought that when all males in the boundaries of Israel were circumcised the Messiah would come. This helps us see why it was hard for Jewish Christians to let the issue go.

⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— Galatians 2:4 I believe Paul is sharing in verses 4 and 5 what happened in Antioch. False brothers, I refer to as Judaizers, wanted to convert Gentile believers in Antioch to the Law before they considered them to be brothers. Perhaps it was so that their fellow Jews who were not believers in Jesus would respect them and not criticize them for being with Gentiles. They were trying to fit into both worlds so as not to be looked down on by either. They were worried about what other Jews thought of them. This may be one reason Paul said he was not a man-pleaser (Galatians 1:10ⁱⁱⁱ). Trying to fit into both worlds is a very real temptation (Acts 21:20-22^{xxvi}). Our old nature doesn't like rejection and craves respect. The new nature, however, simply wants to please God.

The pattern we see here has been used ever since. Someone new to the church looks for people who are easily influenced. Instead of taking their doctrine to the elders, they take it secretly to the people one by one to see if any are receptive. That ask, "You want a deeper walk with the Lord, don't you? Let me show you what the elders haven't told you yet." And little by little they build a faction, start a Bible study, and the cancer begins to spread until it is brought into the light. But by then, many have been influenced and gentle but firm care must be taken to try to help the young Christians understand why the doctrine is in error.

In Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, he called these kind of teachers "super-apostles" (2 Corinthians 11:4-6^{xxvii}). Over the years we have seen a number of them come through the church. They have conviction, charisma, and seem so knowledgeable, but if you listen carefully, you will hear their message is all to their glory, not that of Jesus. They are not interested in what God has been doing in the church. They are critical and use criticism as a way to exalt themselves. They want others to listen to them, but they do not have a heart to listen to others.

⁵ *to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.* Galatians 2:5 The elders in Antioch did not budge from their stand. They understood that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone. Works have nothing to do with earning favor with God. The church of Antioch was a good example to the churches of Galatia because they didn't yield to this enticing doctrine. The doctrine of grace had to be kept pure for the sake of future believers such as those Galatians to whom Paul was writing. To Paul, circumcision or an uncircumcised condition was not important. What was important was new life in Christ (Galatians 6:15^{xxviii}), the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Do we not have the same duty, not to trifle over minor interpretations, but to keep pure the good gospel of Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone? We need to keep the main thing the main thing and respectfully tolerate differences on the minor issues. Those minor issues can be discussed with love and grace, but always return to the essentials of our faith. Never allow minor issues to be divisive, but insist on unity in the key doctrines (Ephesians 4:3^{xxix}).

⁶ *And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.* Galatians 2:6 God shows no partiality is a reference back to Peter's revelation in Acts 10:34^{xxx} and even further back to Deuteronomy 10:17. ¹⁷ *or the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great, the mighty, and the awesome God, who is not partial and takes no bribe.* He looks on the heart, not the wallet, or the physical features, or title, or the position. And as imitators of God, we should seek to do the same (Ephesians 5:1^{xxxi}). Bold impressive speakers who are full of facts may turn our heads, but the modest simple person who has spent time in the presence of Jesus and meditated on the Word is the one who speaks an inspired word to our hearts (1 Peter 4:11^{xxxii}). When Paul writes, "what they were" he may be referring to the fact that the apostles had been simple fishermen, but that made no difference to him.

The expression "those who seemed" need not carry such a derogatory connotation. It may simply mean, as the Jerusalem Bible renders it, "these people who

are acknowledged leaders.” In other words, Paul may simply have been using a common term of respect to refer to those leaders who were indeed men of high reputation and considered to be authorities among the believers in Jerusalem. Had Paul meant this term in a decidedly negative way, he would have undercut his own argument, namely, that he and the Jerusalem “pillars” were, after all, on the same team.^{xxxiii}

⁷ *On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised* ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), Galatians 2:7,8 It seemed good to the elders and the to have Paul the official apostle to the Gentiles as Peter was to the Jews. This does not mean there were two different gospels. Paul said in the first chapter there is no other gospel (1:7). They were recognizing spheres of influence given by the Holy Spirit. Peter would be mainly reaching the Jewish world while Paul reached out to the Gentile world.

⁹ *and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.* Galatians 2:9 These apostolic leaders affirmed that this was God's will and a part of the working of the Holy Spirit in the world. It is the same church in different facets, just as we see today in all the church's diversity. Everyone has a unique calling. We don't ridicule those who emphasize charity, or the those who emphasize the gifts of the Spirit, or those who emphasize contemplative prayer, and we hope they don't criticize us who emphasize the study of the Word. We are all a part of the same body striving to know God's will and yield our lives as His servants. We all have our part in manifesting Jesus through our God given callings. Our differences should make up a symphony of various instruments all playing their parts in perfect harmony to the glory of God. It is all the same gospel of grace.

¹⁰ *Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.* Galatians 2:10 I believe Paul is referring to the secret meeting when he brought the financial gift from Antioch. At the second meeting in Acts 15:28,29^{xxxiv}, which was a more public meeting to announce salvation by grace alone as the church's official belief, the leaders asked that Gentiles not offend the Jews. This included not eating things strangled and with the blood, not committing fornication, and not eating food offered to idols. That was not so that those actions would save them, but so that the Jews are not offended making it harder to help them hear that Jesus is the Messiah. The Jews in Jerusalem were hearing of these behaviors among converts in foreign lands which made it harder for them to receive the gospel. Paul tells us not to do anything that would stumble our brother (Romans 14:13^{xxxv}).

This one requirement of remembering the poor was something Paul was eager to do and had just done by bringing the gift from Antioch. The church in Jerusalem was still feeding the Christian widows (Acts 6:1^{xxxvi}; 2 Corinthians 6:3^{xxxvii}). The church was sometimes referred to as The Poor because the church there was so impoverished. We should never be outdone in charity by non-believers. Love for one another and for Christ demands it.

Luther sums up the message of our verses for today. *Human beings are forever trying to add something to God's completed work of salvation. It may be Jesus Christ and*

the mass, or Jesus Christ and water baptism, or Jesus Christ and good works, or Jesus Christ and a charismatic experience. Paul's argument is that nothing, absolutely nothing, can be mingled with Christ as a ground of our acceptance with God. Our hope is built on nothing less—and nothing more—than Jesus' blood and righteousness.^{xxxviii}

Questions

- 1 Why was Paul so dedicated to his message?
- 2 Review Paul's first 17 years as a believer in Jesus.
- 3 What are the essentials of the Christian faith?
- 4 Why did Paul take the question to the apostles?
- 5 Why did Paul point out that the Antioch church refused to listen to those teachers?
- 6 Why should we major on the majors and minor on the minors?
- 7 Why should we be impartial when it comes to respect for others?
- 8 What was the official ruling of the apostles?
- 9 Why does the church have various emphases?
- 10 Why do we try not to offend others?

ⁱ **Titus 3:5 (ESV)**

⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

ⁱⁱ **Galatians 1:1 (ESV)**

¹ Paul, an apostle—not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—

ⁱⁱⁱ **Galatians 1:10 (ESV)**

¹⁰ For am I now seeking the approval of man, or of God? Or am I trying to please man? If I were still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ.

^{iv} **Acts 20:24 (ESV)**

²⁴ But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God.

^v **1 Corinthians 15:31 (ESV)**

³¹ I protest, brothers, by my pride in you, which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die every day!

^{vi} **Acts 9:27 (ESV)**

²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles and declared to them how on the road he had seen the Lord, who spoke to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus.

^{vii} **Acts 11:29-30 (ESV)**

²⁹ So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

³⁰ And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

^{viii} **Titus 1:5 (ESV)**

⁵ This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what I remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—

^{ix} **2 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

^x **John 10:30 (ESV)**

³⁰ I and the Father are one.”

^{xi} **John 3:16 (ESV)**

¹⁶ “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

^{xii} **Luke 1:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

^{xiii} **2 Corinthians 5:21 (ESV)**

²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

^{xiv} **Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”

^{xv} **Revelation 1:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ and the living one. I died, and behold I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of Death and Hades.

^{xvi} **Matthew 28:18 (ESV)**

¹⁸ And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.

^{xvii} **Isaiah 9:7 (ESV)**

⁷ Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this.

^{xviii} **Ephesians 2:8-9 (ESV)**

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

^{xix} **Acts 16:6-10 (ESV)**

⁶ And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. ⁷ And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. ⁸ So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. ⁹ And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” ¹⁰ And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

^{xx} **Acts 18:9 (ESV)**

⁹ And the Lord said to Paul one night in a vision, “Do not be afraid, but go on speaking and do not be silent,

^{xxi} **Acts 22:18-21 (ESV)**

¹⁸ and saw him saying to me, ‘Make haste and get out of Jerusalem quickly, because they will not accept your testimony about me.’ ¹⁹ And I said, ‘Lord, they themselves know that in one synagogue after another I imprisoned and beat those who believed in you. ²⁰ And when the blood of Stephen your witness was being shed, I myself was standing by and approving and watching over the garments of those who killed him.’ ²¹ And he said to me, ‘Go, for I will send you far away to the Gentiles.’”

^{xxii} **Acts 27:23-24 (ESV)**

²³ For this very night there stood before me an angel of the God to whom I belong and whom I worship, ²⁴ and he said, ‘Do not be afraid, Paul; you must stand before Caesar. And behold, God has granted you all those who sail with you.’

^{xxiii} **Romans 14:19 (ESV)**

¹⁹ So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.

^{xxiv} from the book [Absolute Surrender](#)

^{xxv} **Acts 10:28 (ESV)**

²⁸ And he said to them, “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.

^{xxvi} **Acts 21:20-22 (ESV)**

²⁰ And when they heard it, they glorified God. And they said to him, “You see, brother, how many thousands there are among the Jews of those who have believed. They are all zealous for the law, ²¹ and they have been told about you that you teach all the Jews who are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or walk according to our customs. ²² What then is to be done? They will certainly hear that you have come.

^{xxvii} **2 Corinthians 11:4-6 (ESV)**

⁴ For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus than the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit from the one you received, or if you accept a different gospel from the one you accepted, you put up with it readily enough. ⁵ Indeed, I consider that I am not in the least inferior to these super-apostles. ⁶ Even if I am unskilled in speaking, I am not so in knowledge; indeed, in every way we have made this plain to you in all things.

^{xxviii} **Galatians 6:15 (ESV)**

¹⁵ For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.

^{xxix} **Ephesians 4:3 (ESV)**

³ eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

^{xxx} **Acts 10:34 (ESV)**

³⁴ So Peter opened his mouth and said: “Truly I understand that God shows no partiality,

^{xxxi} **Ephesians 5:1 (ESV)**

¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

^{xxxii} **1 Peter 4:11 (ESV)**

¹¹ whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

^{xxxiii} George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 155). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

^{xxxiv} **Acts 15:28-29 (ESV)**

²⁸ For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements:

²⁹ that you abstain from what has been sacrificed to idols, and from blood, and from what has been strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.”

^{xxxv} **Romans 14:13 (ESV)**

¹³ Therefore let us not pass judgment on one another any longer, but rather decide never to put a stumbling block or hindrance in the way of a brother.

^{xxxvi} **Acts 6:1 (ESV)**

¹ Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

^{xxxvii} **2 Corinthians 6:3 (ESV)**

³ We put no obstacle in anyone’s way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry,

^{xxxviii} George, T. (1994). *Galatians* (Vol. 30, p. 153). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.