

Galatians – Chapter 2 (NASB)

The Council at Jerusalem

2:1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain. 3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. 5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.

In verse 1, Paul points out that after 14 years, he went to Jerusalem. Since the Apostles were there and this is Paul's second visit to Jerusalem, Paul didn't get his Gospel from them. He is letting us know in a roundabout way, his gospel message came from Jesus. As we saw numerous times in Acts, Paul starts out Chapter 2 by defending salvation through grace. He tells the Galatians that even the Christian Council accepted the Gospel of grace. The Christian Council was made up of the apostles and prominent Jewish Christians.

"The matter upon which the apostles deliberated in conference was this: Is the observance of the Law requisite unto justification? Paul answered: 'I have preached faith in Christ to the Gentiles, and not the Law. If the Jews want to keep the Law and be circumcised, very well, as long as they do so from a right motive.' " (Martin Luther)

He points out that the Council (those who were of reputation) did not require Titus to be circumcised. Paul is restating what we studied in Acts 15. Acts 15:5 says, "*Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, 'The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses.'*" Comparing it to Galatians 2:4, Acts 15:5 says that these "false brethren" are the Judaizers, believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees. Another way to describe the false Gospel that the Judaizers were teaching was the "system of legalism". The Christian Council didn't even give these Judaizers an hour to speak.

2:6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised 8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

Verse 6 points out that those of "high reputation" or famous Christians didn't add anything to the Gospel that Paul preached. Note: We cannot read the tone of Paul's voice in what we read. These words can be taken in various ways. We can surely see that Paul is not intimidated by them. They are in agreement with Paul. It doesn't matter what they say, Paul's Gospel is from God. Famous or not Paul says that God does not show any favoritism. In Romans 2:11, Paul says it plainly, "For God does not show favoritism." (NIV) Other translations use the word, partiality.

“Paul’s words are neither a denial of, nor a mark of disrespect for, their apostolic authority. He is simply indicating that, although he accepts their office as apostles, he is not overawed by their person as it was being inflated (by the false teachers).” (Stott)

Paul points out that in the end, the Christian leaders accepted that God had entrusted Paul with sharing the Gospel with the Gentiles (NLT) or uncircumcised (NASB) and Peter with sharing the Gospel with the Jews (NLT) or circumcised (NASB). Paul says in verse 9 that James, Peter and John accepted Paul and Barnabas as co-workers (NLT) or apostles. The only reminder that the apostles gave to Paul was to remember the poor which Paul was eager to do anyway.

Peter (Cephas) Opposed by Paul

2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. 12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. 13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy. 14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, “If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?”

In verse 11, Paul tells us that Peter came to Antioch and Paul opposed him. This example is meant to confirm that Paul is a true apostle because only a true apostle could rebuke another apostle. In Acts 11, God had called Peter to go to Caesarea to welcome Gentiles into Christianity without them becoming Jews. Paul opposed or rebuked Peter because he was eating with the Gentiles when he arrived but due to peer pressure he wouldn’t eat with them after other Jewish believers arrived. Even Barnabas was led astray. Peter had become a hypocrite. Paul said to Peter, “If you are a Jew that is living like a Gentile and not like a Jew, then how can you make the Gentiles live like Jews.”

2:15 “We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles; 16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.

Paul reminds Peter that we are made righteous by Jesus’ work on the cross and not by works of the Law.

Not justified by the works of the law: This is Paul’s first use of the great ancient Greek word *dikaioo* (justified, declared righteous) in his letter to the Galatians. “It is a legal concept; the person who is ‘justified’ is the one who gets the verdict in a court of law. Used in a religious sense it means the getting of a favorable verdict before God on judgment day.” (Morris)

Paul points out the irony of what Peter is thinking. The Jews are born into salvation and the Gentiles are born as “sinners”.

2:17 But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be! 18 For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor. 19 For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 I do not nullify the grace of God, for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.”

Those that believed that we need the law argue, "If we are no longer under the Law then can we freely sin and is faith in Jesus leading us to sin?" Paul says "Absolutely not!" We seek to be justified by Christ and not by Christ plus works. Even though we are justified by Christ we will continue to sin but Jesus does not lead us to sin. This has to be an issue in the Catholic Church. If I confess my sins to a priest one day then I can go out and wildly sin the rest of the week. Paul would have the same response to those that think so. "Absolutely not!!"

"In verse 18, essentially Paul said, "There is more sin in trying to find acceptance before God by our law-keeping than there is sin in everyday life as a Christian." (Guzik)

Only Jesus kept the law perfectly. So to put your relationship with God on a legalistic basis will make you a lawbreaker. The NLT says verse 19 clearly, "*For when I tried to keep the law, it condemned me. So I died to the law—I stopped trying to meet all its requirements—so that I might live for God.*" Accepting Christ as your savior means that you are crucified with Christ and I give up control of my life to Him so that He lives in me.

"Faith connects you so intimately with Christ, that He and you become as it were one person. As such you may boldly say: "I am now one with Christ. Therefore Christ's righteousness, victory, and life are mine." On the other hand, Christ may say: "I am that big sinner. His sins and his death are mine, because he is joined to me, and I to him." (Luther)

Verse 20 in the NASB Paul says "the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God". The NLT uses the words earthly body. Verse 20 is about faith and not flesh. Paul concludes the chapter by pointing out the difference between grace and the Law. If my righteousness comes from keeping the Law then Jesus died for no reason.

Ephesians 2:8 sums up what Paul is saying at the end of Galatians 2. "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith--and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God."