



SERIES: GALATIANS

GALATIANS 2:1-10

December 7, 2009

The theme of Paul's letter to the Galatians is the gospel. The churches in that region had allowed "false brothers" to creep into the church and attack both Paul and the gospel he preaches. In this letter, Paul defends himself and his teachings by saying that his authority and message comes from God.

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. 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 run in vain.

Paul shows great humility here when, after at least 17 years of fruitful ministry, he approaches the church and the apostles (Peter, James, and John) with his teachings to ensure that they are accurate. This demonstrates to us that submission to godly authority is important, and that it's good to check biblical teachings to ensure they are accurate.

3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

The issue in Galatia is false teachers saying that Christians ought to be circumcised (as Old Testament Jews were) to prove their faith in God. Paul rejects this by saying that Jesus is the fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5) and that circumcision is a matter of the heart, not the flesh (Romans 2:29). To be a Christian requires faith in Jesus alone, not in addition to circumcision.

Today, the debate is not usually over circumcision but other issues. Some say that to be a true Christian one must have faith in Jesus *and*:

- Be baptized
- Take communion
- Speak in tongues
- Say the "sinner's prayer"
- Go through Catholic rituals such as Confirmation and Reconciliation
- Use the KJV
- Sing hymns
- Dress a certain way
- ...the list goes on!

None of this is true. While many of the above could be important issues, they are not necessary for one to be saved. **ONLY TRUE FAITH IN JESUS IS REQUIRED.** To add anything else is to teach a false gospel. In Galatia, it was Jesus plus circumcision. Today, it is Jesus plus any number of things. However, the one true gospel is salvation by true faith in Jesus *alone*.

To prove his point, Paul brings along Titus, who is a faithful pastor and servant of God. Paul presents Titus to these false teachers and essentially confronts them with



this question: Is Titus a Christian or not? Since Titus is not circumcised, the false teachers must say "no", which would expose how ridiculous their teachings really are, since Titus bears the fruit of a true Christian who loves and serves Jesus.

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—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.

God, through Paul, identifies these individuals as "false brothers"—they are not true Christians. These people are more interested in their own agenda than the advancement of God's kingdom. The language used describes these people as being very deceitful...they are "spies" who "slipped in". This means we must be on watch for these individuals as they are among us in the church, and likely sound very spiritual but don't truly serve Jesus.

They have come to impose rules in addition to the Bible. Christianity has open issues and closed issues. In our closed hand go central doctrines like Christ's deity, salvation by grace through faith, the truth of Scripture, the Trinity, etc. In the open hand are issues that we can be diverse with, such as musical style, church philosophy, personal convictions, and the like. As Christians, we have great freedom in Christ—not to sin, but variety in how we live as Christians and do ministry as the Church. This means many Christians will look different and do things differently than other Christians; as long as they are Jesus-focused and not in sin, then this is wonderful and acceptable.

Paul says that to the individuals who seek to take our freedom and make us slaves, he "did not yield in submission even for a moment". These people are to be ignored and not caved into. The reason is because the truth of the gospel is at stake!

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.

When Paul shared his teachings with Peter, James, John, and the other apostles, they confirmed that Paul's teachings were accurate and that he was indeed preaching the true gospel.

7 On the contrary when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 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.

God had called Peter to preach to Jews and Paul to Gentiles. Though this meant that Peter and Paul's ministries might look quite different, the same gospel was taught. God calls us each to share the one true gospel but in different ways to different people. Thus, we Christians ought to be able to "extend the right hand of fellowship" and bless each other in our various ministries, so long as the gospel is the same.



10 Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

In addition to preaching the true gospel, we ought to be involved in doing good works. A changed heart leads us to love others, which is the second-greatest commandment.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What does Paul's encounter with the apostles tell us about church leadership?
2. What are common unbiblical teachings that get added to the gospel?
3. In what ways today can we choose to love our neighbour?