

**Galatians 2**  
**July 10, 2022**

**Open with Prayer**

**HOOK:**

Q: To what lengths would we go to in order to fight for and/or maintain the integrity of the gospel? Or do we just zip our lip and quietly say to ourselves people are entitled to their opinions. Because after all... We're not supposed to talk politics and religion! [Let people engage]

**Transition:** Paul is deeply concerned that his new converts are being influenced by Judaizers who want to add following portions of the Law to be a Christian. Paul wasn't able to smooth talk anybody. In fact, he had to confront Peter publicly because he should've known better. Let's see how Paul deals with this issue. Let's begin.

**BOOK:**

***Paul Accepted by the Apostles***

<sup>2</sup> Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem, this time with Barnabas. I took Titus along also. <sup>2</sup> I went in response to a revelation and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders, for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain. <sup>3</sup> Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek. <sup>4</sup> This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup> We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

<sup>6</sup> As for those who seemed to be important—whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance—those men added nothing to my message. <sup>7</sup> On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (uncircumcised), just as Peter had been to the Jews (circumcised). <sup>8</sup> For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. <sup>9</sup> James, Peter and John, those reputed to be 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 Jews. <sup>10</sup> All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

***Paul Opposes Peter***

<sup>11</sup> When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. <sup>12</sup> Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup> The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray.

<sup>14</sup> When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?"

<sup>15</sup> "We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' <sup>16</sup> know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So, we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that

we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.

<sup>17</sup>“If, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! <sup>18</sup>If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a lawbreaker. <sup>19</sup>For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. <sup>20</sup>I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. <sup>21</sup>I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

**Process Observations/Questions:**

Q: What did you most like about this passage? What resonated with you? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you least like about this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What did you find in this passage that you didn't understand? [Let people engage]

Q: What do we learn about Jesus in this passage? [Let people engage]

Q: What is your takeaway? [Let people engage]

**LOOK:**

If a man could get right with God simply by observing the Jewish law, then Jesus died in vain. This is a pivotal statement in the letter. Life through faith in Jesus is liberation. The law stood for judgment and condemnation. Faith stands for forgiveness and freedom. The Galatian Christians, then, are free from the oppressiveness and irrelevance of Levitical law. Paul's authority in declaring this freedom for Gentile believers has been authenticated.

**Close in Prayer**

## **Commentaries for Today's Lesson:**

**Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible Exposition Commentary (Vol. 2, pp. 689-697). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.***

This will remain the land of the free only so long as it is the home of the brave.”

So wrote veteran news analyst Elmer Davis in his book *But We Were Born Free*, and his convictions would certainly be echoed by the Apostle Paul. To Paul, his spiritual liberty in Christ was worth far more than popularity or even security. He was willing to fight for that liberty.

Paul's first fight for Christian liberty was at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–35; Gal. 2:1–10); his second was at a private meeting with Peter (Gal. 2:11–21). Had Paul been unwilling to wage this spiritual warfare, the church in the first century might have become only a Jewish sect, preaching a mixture of Law and grace. But because of Paul's courage, the Gospel was kept free from legalism, and it was carried to the Gentiles with great blessing.

Before we look at the three acts in the first drama, the Council at Jerusalem, we must get acquainted with the participants. *Paul*, of course, we know as the great apostle to the Gentiles.

*Barnabas* was one of Paul's closest friends. In fact, when Paul tried to get into the fellowship of the Jerusalem church, it was Barnabas who opened the way for him (Acts 9:26–28).

The name *Barnabas* means “son of encouragement,” and you will always find Barnabas encouraging somebody. When the Gospel came to the Gentiles in Antioch, it was Barnabas who was sent to encourage them in their faith (Acts 11:19–24).

Thus, from the earliest days, Barnabas was associated with the Gentile believers. It was Barnabas who enlisted Paul to help minister at the church in Antioch (Acts 11:25–26), and the two of them worked together, not only in teaching, but also in helping the poor (Acts 11:27–30).

Barnabas accompanied Paul on the first missionary trip (Acts 13:1–14:28) and had seen God's blessings on the Gospel that they preached. It is worth noting that it was Barnabas who encouraged young John Mark after he had “dropped out” of the ministry and incurred the displeasure of Paul (Acts 13:13; 15:36–41). In later years, Paul was able to commend Mark and benefit from his friendship (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11).

*Titus* was a Gentile believer who worked with Paul and apparently was won to Christ through the apostle's ministry (Titus 1:4). He was a “product” of the apostle's ministry among the Gentiles and was taken to the Jerusalem conference as “exhibit A” from the Gentile churches. In later years, Titus assisted Paul by going to some of the most difficult churches to help them solve their problems (2 Cor. 7; Titus 1:5).

Three men were the “pillars” of the church in Jerusalem: Peter, John, and James, the brother of the Lord (who must not be confused with the Apostle James, who was killed by Herod, Acts 12:1–2). *Peter*, we know from his prominent part in the accounts in the Gospels as well as in the first half of the Book of Acts. It was to Peter that Jesus gave “the keys,” so that it was he who was involved in opening the door of faith to the Jews (Acts 2), the Samaritans (Acts 8), and the Gentiles (Acts 10). *John* we also know from the Gospel records as one of Christ's “inner three” apostles, associated with Peter in the ministry of the Word (Acts 3:1ff).

It is *James* who perhaps needs more introduction. The Gospel record indicates that Mary and Joseph had other children, and James was among them (Matt. 13:55; Mark 6:3). (Of course, Jesus was born by the power of the Spirit, and not through natural generation; Matt. 1:18–25; Luke 1:26–38.) Our Lord's brothers and sisters did not believe in Him during His earthly ministry (John 7:1–5). Yet we find “His brethren” associated with the believers in the early church (Acts 1:13–14). Paul informs us that the risen Christ appeared to James, and this was the

turning point in his life (1 Cor. 15:5–7). James was the leader of the early church in Jerusalem (Acts 15; see also 21:18). He was also the writer of the Epistle of James; and that letter, plus Acts 21:18, would suggest that he was very Jewish in his thinking.

Along with these men, and the “Apostles and elders” (Acts 15:4, 6), were a group of “false brethren” who infiltrated the meetings and tried to rob the believers of their liberty in Christ (Gal. 2:4). Undoubtedly these were some of the Judaizers who had followed Paul in church after church and had tried to capture his converts. The fact that Paul calls them “false brethren” indicates that they were not true Christians, but were only masquerading as such so they could capture the conference for themselves.

This, then, is the cast of characters. Acts 15 should be read along with Galatians 2:1–10 to get the full story of the event.

### **Act 1—The Private Consultation (Gal. 2:1–2)**

Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch from their first missionary journey, excited about the way God had “opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles” (Acts 14:27). But the Jewish legalists in Jerusalem were upset with their report; so they came to Antioch and taught, in effect, that a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian (Acts 15:1).

Circumcision, which they demanded of the Gentiles, was an important Jewish rite, handed down from the days of Abraham (Gen. 17). Submitting to circumcision meant accepting and obeying the whole Jewish Law. Actually, the Jewish people had forgotten the inner, spiritual meaning of the rite (Deut. 10:16; Jer. 4:1–4; Rom. 2:25–29), just as some churches today have lost the spiritual meaning of baptism and have turned it into an external ritual. The true Christian has experienced an inner circumcision of the heart (Col. 2:10–11) and does not need to submit to any physical operation (Phil. 3:1–3).

When Paul and Barnabas confronted these men with the truth of the Gospel, the result was a heated argument (Acts 15:2). It was decided that the best place to settle the question was before the church leaders in Jerusalem. We should not think that this “Jerusalem Conference” was a representative meeting from all the churches, such as a denominational conference; it was not. Paul, Barnabas, Titus, and certain other men from Antioch represented the Gentile Christians who had been saved totally apart from Jewish Law; but there were no representatives from the churches Paul had established in Gentile territory.

When the deputation arrived in Jerusalem, they met privately with the church leaders. Paul did not go to Jerusalem because the church sent him; he “went up by revelation”—that is, the Lord sent him (compare Gal. 2:1 and 1:12). And the Lord gave him the wisdom to meet with the leaders first so that they would be able to present a united front at the public meetings.

“Lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain” (Gal. 2:2) does not mean that Paul was unsure either of his message or his ministry. His conduct on the way to the conference indicates that he had no doubts (Acts 15:3). What he was concerned about was the future of the Gospel among the Gentiles, because this was his specific ministry from Christ. If the “pillars” sided with the Judaizers, or tried to compromise, then Paul’s ministry would be in jeopardy. He wanted to get their approval *before* he faced the whole assembly; otherwise a three-way division could result.

What was the result of this private consultation? *The Apostles and elders approved Paul’s Gospel.* They added nothing to it (Gal. 2:6b) and thereby declared the Judaizers to be wrong. But this private meeting was only the beginning.

## Act 2—The Public Convocation (Gal. 2:3–5)

The historical account of the Council of Jerusalem is recorded by Luke (Acts 15:6–21). Several witnesses presented the case for the Gospel of the grace of God, beginning with Peter (Acts 15:7–11). It was he who had been chosen by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles originally (Acts 10); and he reminds the assembly that God gave the Holy Spirit to the believing Gentiles just as He did to the Jews, so that there was “no difference.”

This had been a difficult lesson for the early Christians to learn, because for centuries there had been a difference between Jews and Gentiles (Lev. 11:43–47; 20:22–27). In His death on the cross, Jesus had broken down the barriers between Jews and Gentiles (Eph. 2:11–22), so that in Christ there are no racial differences (Gal. 3:28). In his speech to the conference, Peter makes it clear that there is but one way of salvation: faith in Jesus Christ.

Then Paul and Barnabas told the assembly what God had done among the Gentiles (Acts 15:12), and what a “missionary report” that must have been! The “false brethren” who were there must have debated with Paul and Barnabas, but the two soldiers of the Cross would not yield. Paul wanted the “truth of the Gospel” to continue among the Gentiles (Gal. 2:5).

It seems that Titus became a “test case” at this point. He was a Gentile Christian who had never submitted to circumcision. Yet it was clear to all that he was genuinely saved. Now, if the Judaizers were right (“Except you be circumcised after the manner of Moses, you cannot be saved,” Acts 15:1), *then Titus was not a saved man*. But he *was* a saved man, and gave evidence of having the Holy Spirit; therefore, the Judaizers were wrong.

At this point, it might be helpful if we considered another associate of Paul—Timothy (see Acts 16:1–3). Was Paul being inconsistent by refusing to circumcise Titus, yet agreeing to circumcise Timothy? No, because two different issues were involved. In the case of Timothy, Paul was not submitting to Jewish Law in order to win him to Christ. Timothy was part Jew, part Gentile, and his lack of circumcision would have hindered his ministry among the people of Israel. Titus was a full Gentile, and for him to have submitted would have indicated that he was missing something in his Christian experience. To have circumcised Titus would have been cowardice and compromise; *not* to have circumcised Timothy would have been to create unnecessary problems in his ministry.

James, the leader of the church, gave the summation of the arguments and the conclusion of the matter (Acts 15:13–21). As Jewish as he was, he made it clear that a Gentile does *not* have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. God’s program for this day is to “take out of the Gentiles a people for His name.” Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way: through faith in Jesus Christ. James then asked that the assembly counsel the Gentiles to do nothing that would offend unbelieving Jews, lest they hinder them from being saved. Paul won the battle.

His view prevailed in the private meeting when the leaders approved his Gospel and in the public meeting when the group agreed with Paul and opposed the Judaizers.

Echoes of the Jerusalem Conference are heard repeatedly in Paul’s Letter to the Galatians. Paul mentions the “yoke of bondage” (Gal. 5:1), reminding us of Peter’s similar warning (Acts 15:10). The themes of liberty and bondage are repeated often (Gal. 2:4; 4:3, 9, 21–31; 5:1), as is the idea of circumcision (Gal. 2:3; 5:3–4; 6:12–13).

Centuries later, today’s Christians need to appreciate afresh the courageous stand Paul and his associates took for the liberty of the Gospel. Paul’s concern was “the truth of the Gospel” (Gal. 2:5, 14), not the “peace of the church.” The wisdom that God sends from above is “first pure, then peaceable” (James 3:17). “Peace at any price” was not Paul’s philosophy of ministry, nor should it be ours.

Ever since Paul's time, the enemies of grace have been trying to add something to the simple Gospel of the grace of God. They tell us that a man is saved by faith in Christ *plus* something—good works, the Ten Commandments, baptism, church membership, religious ritual—and Paul makes it clear that these teachers are wrong. In fact, Paul pronounces a curse on any person (man or angel) who preaches any other gospel than the Gospel of the grace of God, centered in Jesus Christ (Gal. 1:6–9; see 1 Cor. 15:1–7 for a definition of the Gospel). It is a serious thing to tamper with the Gospel.

### **Act 3—The Personal Confirmation (Gal. 2:6–10)**

The Judaizers had hoped to get the leaders of the Jerusalem church to disagree with Paul. By contrast, Paul makes it clear that he himself was not impressed either by the persons or the positions of the church leaders. He respected them, of course. Otherwise he would not have consulted with them privately. But he did not fear them or seek to buy their influence. All he wanted them to do was recognize “the grace of God” at work in his life and ministry (Gal. 2:9), and this they did.

Not only did the assembly approve Paul's Gospel, and oppose Paul's enemies, but they encouraged Paul's ministry and recognized publicly that God had committed the Gentile aspect of His work into Paul's hands. They could add nothing to Paul's message or ministry, and they dared not take anything away. There was agreement and unity: one Gospel would be preached to Jews and to Gentiles.

However, the leaders recognized that God had assigned different areas of ministry to different men. Apart from his visit to the household of Cornelius (Acts 10) and to the Samaritans (Acts 8), Peter had centered his ministry primarily among the Jews. Paul had been called as God's special ambassador to the Gentiles. So, it was agreed that each man would minister in the sphere assigned to him by God.

“The Gospel of the circumcision” and “the Gospel of the uncircumcision” are not two different messages; it had already been agreed that there is only one Gospel. Rather, we have here two different spheres of ministry, one to the Jews and the other to the Gentiles. Peter and Paul would both preach the same Gospel, and the same Lord would be at work in and through them (Gal. 2:8), but they would minister to different peoples.

This does not mean that Paul would never seek to win the Jews. To the contrary, he had a great burden on his heart for his people (Rom. 9:1–3). In fact, when Paul came to a city, he would first go to the Jewish synagogue, if there was one, and start his work among his own people. Nor was Peter excluded from ministering to the Gentiles. But each man would concentrate his work in his own sphere assigned to him by the Holy Spirit. James, Peter, and John would go to the Jews; Paul would go to the Gentiles (Gal. 2:9b, where the word *heathen* means “Gentile nations”).

The Jerusalem Conference began with a great possibility for division and dissension; yet it ended with cooperation and agreement. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps. 133:1). Perhaps we need to practice some of this same cooperation today.

We need to recognize the fact that God calls people to different ministries in different places; yet we all preach the same Gospel and are seeking to work together to build His church. Among those who know and love Christ, there can be no such thing as “competition.” Peter was a great man, and perhaps the leading apostle; yet he gladly yielded to Paul—a newcomer—and permitted him to carry on his ministry as the Lord led him. Previously, Paul explained his

*independence* from the Apostles (Gal. 1); now in Galatians 2 he points out his *interdependence* with the Apostles. He was free, and yet he was willingly in fellowship with them in the ministry of the Gospel.

We move next from the theological to the practical—helping the poor (Gal. 2:10). Certainly these things go together. Correct doctrine is never a substitute for Christian duty (James 2:14–26). Too often our church meetings discuss problems, but they fail to result in practical help for the needy world. Paul had always been interested in helping the poor (Acts 11:27–30), so he was glad to follow the leaders’ suggestion.

Even though the conference ended with Paul and the leaders in agreement, it did not permanently solve the problem. The Judaizers did not give up, but persisted in interfering with Paul’s work and invading the churches he founded. Paul carried the good news of the council’s decision to the churches in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia (Acts 15:23) and in the other areas where he had ministered (Acts 16:4). But the Judaizers followed at his heels (like yelping dogs—see Phil. 3:1–3), starting at Antioch where they even swayed Peter to their cause (see Gal. 2:11ff).

There is little question that the Judaizers went to the churches of Galatia to sow their seeds of discord, and for this reason Paul had to write the letter we are now studying. It may have been written from Antioch shortly after the Council of Jerusalem, though some scholars date it later and have Paul writing from either Ephesus or Corinth. These historical details are important, but they are not vital to an understanding of the letter itself. Suffice it to say that this is probably Paul’s earliest letter, and in it we find every major doctrine that Paul believed, preached, and wrote about in his subsequent ministry.

The curtain falls on this drama, but it will go up to reveal another. Once again God’s “freedom fighter” will have to defend the truth of the Gospel, this time before Peter.

### *Galatians 2:11–21*

“Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty!”

Wendell Phillips said that at a Massachusetts antislavery meeting in 1852, but its sentiment is valid today—not only in the realm of the political, but even more so in the realm of the spiritual. Paul had risked his life to carry the Gospel of God’s grace to the regions beyond, and he was not willing for the enemy to rob him or his churches of their liberty in Christ. It was this “spiritual vigilance” that led Paul into another dramatic encounter, this time with the Apostle Peter, Barnabas, and some of the friends of James. Again, the drama is in three acts.

### **Peter’s Relapse (Gal. 2:11–13)**

Apparently, sometime after the important conference described in Acts 15, Peter came from Jerusalem to Antioch. The first thing to note is *Peter’s freedom* then. He enjoyed fellowship with *all* the believers, Jews and Gentiles alike. To “eat with the Gentiles” meant to accept them, to put Jews and Gentiles on the same level as one family in Christ.

Raised as an orthodox Jew, Peter had a difficult time learning this lesson. Jesus had taught it while He was with Peter before the Crucifixion (Matt. 15:1–20). The Holy Spirit had reemphasized it when He sent Peter to the home of Cornelius, the Roman centurion (Acts 10). Furthermore, the truth had been accepted and approved by the conference of leaders at Jerusalem (Acts 15). Peter had been one of the key witnesses at that time.

Before we criticize Peter, perhaps we had better examine our own lives to see how many familiar Bible doctrines *we* are actually obeying. As you examine church history, you see that,

even with a complete Bible, believers through the years have been slow to believe and practice the truths of the Christian faith. When we think of the persecution and discrimination that have been practiced in the name of Christ, it embarrasses us. It is one thing for us to defend a doctrine in a church meeting, and quite something else to put it into practice in everyday life.

Peter's freedom was threatened by *Peter's fear*. While he was in Antioch, the church was visited by some of the associates of James. (You will remember that James was a strict Jew even though he was a Christian believer.) Paul does not suggest that James sent these men to investigate Peter, or even that they were officials of the Jerusalem church. No doubt they belonged to the "circumcision party" (Acts 15:1, 5) and wanted to lead the Antioch church into religious legalism.

After his experience with Cornelius, Peter had been "called on the carpet" and had ably defended himself (Acts 11). But now, he became afraid. Peter had not been afraid to obey the Spirit when He sent him to Cornelius, nor was he afraid to give his witness at the Jerusalem Conference. But now, with the arrival of some members of "the opposition," Peter lost his courage. "The fear of man bringeth a snare" (Prov. 29:25).

How do we account for this fear? For one thing, we know that Peter was an impulsive man. He could show amazing faith and courage one minute and fail completely the next. He walked on the waves to go to Jesus, but then became frightened and began to sink. He boasted in the Upper Room that he would willingly die with Jesus, and then denied his Lord three times. Peter in the Book of Acts is certainly more consistent than in the four Gospels, but he was not perfect—*nor are we!* Peter's fear led to Peter's *fall*. He ceased to enjoy the "love feast" with the Gentile believers and separated himself from them.

There are two tragedies to Peter's fall. First, it made him a hypocrite (which is the meaning of the word *dissembled*). Peter pretended that his actions were motivated by faithfulness, when they were really motivated by fear. How easy it is to use "Bible doctrine" to cover up our disobedience.

The second tragedy is that *Peter led others astray with him*. Even Barnabas was involved. Barnabas had been one of the spiritual leaders of the church in Antioch (Acts 11:19–26), so his disobedience would have a tremendous influence on the others in the fellowship.

Suppose Peter and Barnabas had won the day and led the church into legalism? What might the results have been? Would Antioch have continued to be the great missionary church that sent out Paul and Barnabas? (Acts 13) Would they, instead, have sent out the "missionaries" of the circumcision party and either captured or divided the churches Paul had already founded? You can see that this problem was not a matter of personality or party; it was a question of "the truth of the Gospel." And Paul was prepared to fight for it.

### **Paul's Rebuke (Gal. 2:14–21)**

Bible students are not sure just where Paul's conversation with Peter ends and where his letter to the Galatians continues in the passage. It does not really matter since the entire section deals with the same topic: our liberty in Jesus Christ. We will assume that the entire section represents Paul's rebuke of Peter. It is interesting to note that Paul builds the entire rebuke on doctrine. There are five basic Christian doctrines that were being denied by Peter because of his separation from the Gentiles.

***The unity of the church (v. 14).*** Peter was a Jew, but through his faith in Christ he had become a Christian. Because he was a Christian, he was part of the church, and in the church



there are no racial distinctions (Gal. 3:28). We have seen how the Lord taught Peter this important lesson, first in the house of Cornelius and then at the Jerusalem Conference.

Paul's words must have stung Peter: "You are a Jew, yet you have been living like a Gentile. Now you want the Gentiles to live like Jews. What kind of inconsistency is that?"

Peter himself had stated at the Jerusalem Conference that God had "put no difference between us and them" (Acts 15:9). But now *Peter* was putting a difference. God's people are one people, even though they may be divided into various groups. Any practice on our part that violates the Scripture and separates brother from brother is a denial of the unity of the body of Christ.

***Justification by faith (vv. 15–16).*** This is the first appearance of the important word *justification* in this letter, and probably in Paul's writings (if, as we believe, Galatians was the first letter he wrote). "Justification by faith" was the watchword of the Reformation, and it is important that we understand this doctrine.

"How should [a] man be just with God?" (Job 9:2) was a vital question, because the answer determined eternal consequences. "The just shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4) is God's answer; and it was this truth that liberated Martin Luther from religious bondage and fear. So important is this concept that three New Testament books explain it to us: Romans (see 1:17), Galatians (see 3:11), and Hebrews (see 10:38). Romans explains the meaning of "the just"; Galatians explains "shall live"; and Hebrews explains "by faith."

But what is justification? *Justification is the act of God whereby He declares the believing sinner righteous in Jesus Christ.* Every word of this definition is important. Justification is *an act* and not a process. No Christian is "more justified" than another Christian. "Having therefore been once-and-for-all justified by faith, we have peace with God" (Rom. 5:1, literal translation). Since we are justified by faith, it is an instant and immediate transaction between the believing sinner and God. If we were justified by works, then it would have to be a gradual process.

Furthermore, justification is an act *of God*; it is not the result of man's character or works. "It is God that justifieth" (Rom. 8:33). It is not by doing the "works of the Law" that the sinner gets a right standing before God, but by putting his faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul will explain later in this letter, the Law was given to reveal sin and not to redeem from sin (see Rom. 3:20). God in His grace has put our sins on Christ—and Christ's righteousness has been put to our account (see 2 Cor. 5:21).

In justification, God *declares* the believing sinner righteous; He does not *make* him righteous. (Of course, real justification leads to a changed life, which is what James 2 is all about.) Before the sinner trusts Christ, he stands GUILTY before God; but the moment he trusts Christ, he is declared NOT GUILTY and he can never be called GUILTY again!

Justification is not simply "forgiveness," because a person could be forgiven and then go out and sin and become guilty. Once you have been "justified by faith" you can never be held guilty before God.

Justification is also different from "pardon," because a pardoned criminal still has a record. When the sinner is justified by faith, *his past sins are remembered against him no more*, and God no longer puts his sins on record (see Ps. 32:1–2; Rom. 4:1–8).

Finally, God justifies *sinners*, not "good people." Paul declares that God justifies "the ungodly" (Rom. 4:5). The reason most sinners are not justified is because they will not admit they are sinners! And sinners are the only kind of people Jesus Christ can save (Matt. 9:9–13; Luke 18:9–14).

When Peter separated himself from the Gentiles, he was denying the truth of justification by faith, because he was saying, “We Jews are different from—and better than—the Gentiles.” Yet both Jews and Gentiles are sinners (Rom. 3:22–23) and can be saved only by faith in Christ.

***Freedom from the Law (vv. 17–18).*** At the Jerusalem Conference, Peter had compared the Mosaic Law to a burdensome yoke (Acts 15:10; see Gal. 5:1). Now he had put himself under that impossible yoke.

Paul’s argument goes like this: “Peter, you and I did not find salvation through the Law; we found it through faith in Christ. But now, after being saved, you go back into the Law! This means that Christ alone did not save you; otherwise you would not have needed the Law. So, Christ actually made you a sinner!

“Furthermore, you have preached the Gospel of God’s grace to Jews and Gentiles, and have told them they are saved by faith and not by keeping the Law. By going back into legalism, you are building up what you tore down! This means that you sinned by tearing it down to begin with!”

In other words, Paul is arguing from Peter’s own experience of the grace of God. To go back to Moses is to deny everything that God had done for him and through him.

***The very Gospel itself (vv. 19–20).*** If a man is justified by the works of the Law, then why did Jesus Christ die? His death, burial, and resurrection are the key truths of the Gospel (1 Cor. 15:1–8). We are *saved* by faith in Christ (He died for us), and we *live* by faith in Christ (He lives in us). Furthermore, we are so identified with Christ by the Spirit that *we died with Him* (see Rom. 6). This means that we are dead to the Law. To go back to Moses is to return to the graveyard! We have been “raised to walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4); and since we live by His resurrection power, we do not need the “help” of the Law.

***The grace of God (v. 21).*** The Judaizers wanted to mix Law and grace, but Paul tells us that this is impossible. To go back to the Law means to “set aside” the grace of God.

Peter had experienced God’s grace in his own salvation, and he had proclaimed God’s grace in his own ministry. But when he withdrew from the Gentile Christian fellowship, he openly denied the grace of God.

Grace says, “There is no difference! All are sinners, and all can be saved through faith in Christ!”

But Peter’s actions had said, “There *is* a difference! The grace of God is not sufficient; we also need the Law.”

Returning to the Law nullifies the Cross: “If righteousness came by the Law, then Christ is dead in vain” (Gal. 2:21). Law says DO! Grace says DONE! “It is finished!” was Christ’s victory cry (John 19:30). “For by grace are ye saved through faith” (Eph. 2:8).

We have no record of Peter’s reply to Paul’s rebuke, but Scripture would indicate that he admitted his sin and was restored to the fellowship once again. Certainly when you read his two letters (1 and 2 Peter) you detect no deviation from the Gospel of the grace of God. In fact, the theme of 1 Peter is “the true grace of God” (1 Peter 5:12); and the word *grace* is used in every chapter of the letter. Peter is careful to point out that he and Paul were in complete agreement, lest anyone try to “rob Peter to pay Paul” (2 Peter 3:15–16).

So end the two acts of this exciting drama. But the curtain has not come down yet, for there is a third act which involves you and me.

## **The Believer’s Response**

We know what Peter's response was when he was challenged to live up to the truth of the Gospel: fear and failure. And we know what Paul's response was when he saw the truth of the Gospel being diluted: courage and defense. But the important question *today* is: what is *my* response to the "truth of the Gospel"? Perhaps this is a good place to take inventory of ourselves before we proceed into the doctrinal chapters of this letter. Let me suggest some questions for each of us to answer.

***Have I been saved by the grace of God?*** The only Gospel that saves is the Gospel of the grace of God as revealed in Jesus Christ. Any other Gospel is a false gospel and is under a curse (Gal. 1:6–9). Am I trusting in *myself* for salvation—*my* morality, *my* good works, even *my* religion? If so, then I am not a Christian, for a true Christian is one who has trusted Christ *alone*. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast" (Eph. 2:8–9).

***Am I trying to mix Law and grace?*** Law means I must do something to please God, while grace means that God has finished the work for me and all I need do is believe on Christ. Salvation is not by faith in Christ *plus* something: it is by faith in Christ *alone*. While church membership and religious activities are good in their place as expressions of faith in Christ, they can never be added to faith in Christ in order to secure eternal life. "And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then it is no more grace: otherwise work is no more work" (Rom. 11:6).

***Am I rejoicing in the fact that I am justified by faith in Christ?*** It has often been said that "justified" means "just as if I'd never sinned" and this is correct. It brings great peace to the heart to know that one has a right standing before God (Rom. 5:1). Just think: the righteousness of Christ has been put to our account! God has not only declared that we are righteous in Christ, but He deals with us as though we had never sinned at all! We need never fear judgment because our sins have already been judged in Christ on the cross (Rom. 8:1).

***Am I walking in the liberty of grace?*** Liberty does not mean license; rather, it means the freedom in Christ to enjoy Him and to become what He has determined for us to become (Eph. 2:10). It is not only "freedom to *do*" but also "freedom *not* to do." We are no longer in bondage to sin and the Law. As Paul will explain in the practical section of this letter (Gal. 5–6), we obey God because of love and not because of Law. Christians enjoy a wonderful liberty in Christ. Am I enjoying it?

***Am I willing to defend the truth of the Gospel?*** This does not mean that we become evangelical detectives investigating every church and Sunday School class in town. But it does mean that we do not fear men when they deny the truths that have brought us eternal life in Christ. "Do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10).

Many people with whom we come in contact actually believe that people are saved by faith in Christ plus "doing good works ... keeping the Ten Commandments ... obeying the Sermon on the Mount," and any number of other "religious *plusses*." We may not have the same apostolic authority that Paul exercised, but we do have the Word of God to proclaim; and it is our obligation to share the truth.

***Am I "walking uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel"?*** The best way to defend the truth is to live the truth. My verbal defense of the Gospel will accomplish very little if my life contradicts what I say. Paul is going to explain to us how to live in liberty by the grace of God, and it is important that we obey what he says.

A new employee was instructed how to measure valve parts to make sure they were ready for the final assembly. But after a few hours, his foreman was receiving complaints that the parts he was approving were faulty. “What are you doing?” the foreman asked. “I showed you how to use that micrometer. You’re sending through parts that are oversize!”

The employee replied, “Oh, most of the parts I was measuring were too large, so I opened up the micrometer a bit.”

Changing the standards will never make for success, either in manufacturing or ministry. Paul maintained the standards of “the truth of the Gospel”—and so should we.

**Campbell, D. K. (1985). *Galatians*. In J. F. Walvoord & R. B. Zuck (Eds.), *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures* (Vol. 2, pp. 593-596) Wheaton, IL: Victor Books**

### **B. He was recognized by the apostles (2:1–10)**

While chapter 2 continues Paul’s defense of his apostolic authority and the gospel he preached, he focused not on the source of his message but on its content. Further, whereas in chapter 1 he emphasized his independence from the other apostles, he now demonstrated that there was a basic unity between himself and them.

2:1. Much debate has centered on the question of the identification of this trip which Paul took to **Jerusalem** with **Barnabas**, a Jewish believer, and **Titus**, a Gentile believer. The Book of Acts mentions five Jerusalem visits made by Paul after his conversion: (1) the visit after he left Damascus (Acts 9:26–30; Gal. 1:18–20); (2) the famine visit (Acts 11:27–30); (3) the visit to attend the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–30); (4) the visit at the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:22); (5) the final visit which resulted in Paul’s Caesarean imprisonment (Acts 21:15–23:35). Scholars are divided primarily over whether Galatians 2:1 refers to the famine visit or to the Jerusalem Council visit. But in the context in which he is listing all contacts with human authorities, why would Paul omit reference to his second trip to Jerusalem? And if the reference is to the Council of Acts 15, why did not the apostle allude to its decrees? It seems this passage has the famine visit in view.

2:2. Paul went to Jerusalem on his second visit **in response to a revelation**. That is, he went because God directed him to, not because the Jerusalem leaders had summoned him or called him “on the carpet” for preaching to **the Gentiles**. The reference may well be to Agabus’ prophecy of a famine which prompted Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem on a relief mission (cf. Acts 11:27–30). Paul seized this opportunity to consult with the other apostles **privately** concerning the message he was preaching to the Gentiles. This does not mean Paul sought their approval of its truth and accuracy, for he had received the gospel from God by revelation. Rather, he wanted them to consider its relationship to the gospel they were proclaiming. But if the Jerusalem leaders insisted on circumcision and other requirements of the Law for Gentile converts, Paul’s labor (**running**) among the Gentiles was **in vain**. It was not that the apostle had any doubts or misgivings about the gospel he had preached for 14 years (Gal. 2:1), but that he feared that his past and present ministry might be hindered or rendered of no effect by the Judaizers.

2:3–5. It now becomes apparent why Paul brought **Titus** along on this Jerusalem trip. He was a test case. Would the Jerusalem apostles force the rite of circumcision on a Gentile believer? Paul knew that both Jews and Gentiles are accepted by God through faith in Jesus Christ without any distinction and that the church should do the same. The apostle declared that this truth was

affirmed in Jerusalem because Titus was **not ... compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek**. But this victory did not come easily. Pressure to have Titus circumcised was brought to bear by certain **false brothers** (cf. 2 Peter 2:1). No doubt these were Judaizers, whose chief slogan is found in Acts 15:1: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.” These “false brothers” (“sham Christians,” NEB) were like spies or fifth-column agents who penetrated to search out weak areas of enemy positions. In this case they **infiltrated** (*pareisēlthon*; lit., “sneaked in alongside,” used only here and in Rom. 5:20) the **ranks**, that is, they intruded without invitation into the apostles’ private conference. Their goals were twofold: first, **to spy on** (*kataskopēsai*, used only here in the NT) **the freedom we have in Christ**. With hostile intent they purposed to observe the apostles’ freedom from the Mosaic Law and from the legalism it engenders. Second, they intended to **make Christians slaves**. They wanted to bring believers back into bondage, to enslave them to the Law’s rules and ceremonies. Specifically, they strongly insisted that Titus be circumcised. But Paul stood absolutely firm because **the truth of the gospel** was at stake for the Galatians, and the entire Christian church. To impose circumcision on Titus would be to deny that salvation was by faith alone and to affirm that in addition to faith there must be obedience to the Law for acceptance before God. Thus, the basic issue of the gospel was involved, and Paul would not deviate or yield **for a moment**.

2:6. Having completed his discussion of Titus, Paul resumed the narrative relating to his conference with the apostles in Jerusalem and declared that they **added nothing to his message**. They did not correct or modify Paul’s message but recognized its divine source and affirmed its truth and completeness. But why did the apostle speak in what appears to be a derogatory manner about some of the Jerusalem leaders? In verse 2 he referred to them as “those who seemed to be leaders”; in verse 6 he described them as **those who seemed to be important**; and in verse 9 he finally named “James, Peter, and John” as “those reputed to be pillars.” In view of the fact that Paul’s purpose in this passage was to emphasize his unity with the apostles, it seems best to explain these allusions as stemming from the fact that the Judaizers, in order to disparage Paul, had made much of the Jerusalem leaders. While there may be irony in Paul’s expressions, he declared that he was not awed by the past or present stations of James, Peter, and John. Indeed, they endorsed Paul’s message and received him as an equal.

2:7–9. Further, **James, Peter, and John** recognized that Paul had been divinely commissioned to preach **the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had to the Jews**. Thus, Paul jolted the Judaists by declaring that the leaders in Jerusalem approved of his mission to the Gentiles.

It should be noted that Peter and Paul did not preach two gospels, as might be inferred from the KJV rendering, “the gospel of the uncircumcision” and “the gospel of the circumcision.” There was one gospel though it was preached by different apostles to two distinct groups of people. The reason the apostles concluded that Paul’s commission was equal to Peter’s was the fact that God gave success to both as they preached. This was sealed by James, Peter, and John in their extending to Paul **and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship**. This was a sign of agreement and trust and an indication to all present that they endorsed the division of labor whereby the Jerusalem apostles were appointed to evangelize the Jews and Paul was entrusted to carry the gospel **to the Gentiles**.

2:10. The only request from the leaders in Jerusalem was that Paul **remember the poor** which he affirmed he **was eager to do**. It had been concern for the poor which brought Paul to Jerusalem in order to bring them financial relief (cf. Acts 11:29–30). It was the same concern

which motivated him on his third missionary journey to raise large welfare offerings for needy Christians in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–3). Such offerings would alleviate human suffering, but they would also demonstrate genuine concern on the part of Gentile Christians for Jewish Christians. This in turn would help promote unity and love among believers and help prevent the kinds of misunderstandings which were undermining the Galatian churches.

### *C. He rebuked the reputed chief of the apostles (2:11–21)*

In this final historical incident Paul related how he found it necessary to oppose even Peter, the reputed chief of the apostles, for conduct which threatened to compromise the gospel. The contrast with the previous section is dramatic.

2:11. When Paul visited Jerusalem, Peter (and others) gave him “the right hand of fellowship”; but when **Peter** visited **Antioch**, Paul **opposed him to his face**. The time of Peter’s trip to Antioch is not known. There is no reference to it in the Book of Acts, but perhaps the visit occurred soon after Paul, Barnabas, and Titus returned to Antioch from Jerusalem. At any rate Peter’s conduct in Antioch produced a tense face-to-face confrontation between two Christian leaders. Paul felt compelled to rebuke and condemn Peter for his actions, thus defending the gospel and demonstrating again his own independence and equality as an apostle.

2:12. On arrival at Antioch, Peter found Jewish and Gentile Christians fellowshiping together at mealtimes without regard to Jewish dietary laws. Because of the vision Peter had received at the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:9–15, 28), he felt free **to eat with the Gentiles**, and did so on a regular basis. While it lasted, this was a beautiful demonstration of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. **But** a breach occurred when some arrived from Jerusalem who were shocked at Peter’s conduct. These emissaries **came from James** and belonged **to the circumcision** party, but it is doubtful that they had James’ endorsement. Nonetheless Peter was influenced by their presence and slowly but surely **began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles**. The verb tenses (imperfect) indicate a gradual withdrawal, perhaps from one joint meal a day, and then two; or it may be that he began a meal with Gentiles but finished it with only Jewish Christians. By such actions Peter in effect was teaching that there were two bodies of Christ, Jewish and Gentile. And that was heresy. But why did Peter create this breach? Not because of any change in theology, but simply out of fear. Once, after preaching to Gentile Cornelius, Peter courageously defended himself before the Jerusalem leaders (cf. Acts 11:18); but this time he capitulated to some Jewish friends.

2:13. Like falling dominoes the defection of Peter brought the defection of **the other Jews** and finally **even Barnabas**. The pressure must have been great for Barnabas to succumb because he was from Cyprus, a Gentile center, and was involved in a missionary program with Paul to reach Gentiles with the gospel. All of them—Peter, the other Jewish Christians, and Barnabas—were guilty of **hypocrisy** because while confessing and teaching that they were one in Christ with Gentiles, they were denying this truth by their conduct.

2:14. The response of Paul was electric. What Peter had initiated created a public scandal and therefore deserved a public rebuke. Further, the defectors **were not acting** according to **the truth of the gospel**, that is, they were denying by their actions the truth that on the basis of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection Jews and Gentiles who believe are accepted equally by God. Paul therefore asked Peter before them all, “If you, who are a Jew, do not live like a Jew but like a Gentile, why on earth do you try to make Gentiles live like Jews?” (PH) It was a stinging rebuke. Peter’s response is not recorded. He stood condemned. He was acting contrary to his own

convictions, was betraying Christian liberty, and was casting a slur on fellow believers. Such behavior needed this severe reprimand.

2:15. But how far did the rebuke extend? Considerable discussion has centered on the question as to whether Paul's direct remarks to Peter were limited to verse 14 or whether, as in the NIV, they continued to the end of the chapter. While it is impossible to determine, it would seem that Paul uttered more than one sentence in reproving Peter. The remaining verses of the chapter develop, then, the inconsistency between Peter's behavior and his beliefs. At the same time, they form a superb transition and introduction to chapters 3 and 4 in which Paul defended the key doctrine of justification by faith.

Paul's argument was addressed to those who were **Jews by birth**, including Peter and himself, who in spite of their superior advantages were saved by faith. Why then bind the Law on **Gentile sinners** (said in irony because of Peter's actions), who likewise were saved by faith in Christ?

2:16. In this verse, one of the most important in the epistle, the word *justified* occurs for the first time. It is a legal term, borrowed from the law courts and means "to declare righteous." Its opposite is "to condemn." But since people are condemned sinners and God is holy, how can people be justified? In answer, the apostle made a general declaration that negatively **man is not justified by observing the Law**, but positively, justification is **by faith in Jesus Christ**. This is a strong affirmation of Paul, Peter, and the rest—introduced by **We ... know**. It is followed by a statement in which Paul explained that he had put this doctrine to the test and validated it in his own experience (v. 16b). Finally, in verse 16c the apostle reaffirmed that justification is by faith and not by works (cf. Gen. 15:6).

2:17–18. Paul's opponents argued, however, that since justification by faith eliminated the Law, it encouraged sinful living. A person could believe in Christ for salvation and then do as he pleased, having no need to do good works. Paul hotly denied the charge, especially noting that this made **Christ** the promoter of **sin**. On the contrary, if a believer would return to the Law after trusting Christ alone for salvation, that Law would only demonstrate that he was a sinner, **a lawbreaker**. Though Paul used the first person here, he clearly had in mind Peter, who by his act of withdrawing from Gentile fellowship was returning to the Law.

2:19–20. Paul then distinguished himself from Peter, contrasting what he did with the Law with what Peter did with the Law. Paul described the transformation in a person who has come to God by faith in Christ in terms of a death and a resurrection. The concept is repeated in both verses and the reference in both cases is to a believer's union with Christ in His death and resurrection. First, Paul stated that **through the Law he died to the Law**. The Law demanded death for those who broke it, but Christ paid that death penalty for all sinners. Thus, the Law killed Him and those joined to Him by faith, freeing them to be joined to another, to **live for God** (cf. Rom. 7:4).

In Galatians 2:20 Paul enlarged on the meaning of verse 19. He "died to the Law" because he was **crucified with Christ**; he was able "to live for God" because **Christ** lived in him. Basic to an understanding of this verse is the meaning of union with Christ. This doctrine is based on such passages as Romans 6:1–6 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, which explain that believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ and into the church, the body of all true believers. Having been thus united to Christ, believers share in His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul could therefore write, **I have been** "crucified with Christ" (lit., "I have been and am now crucified with Christ"). This brought death to the Law. It also brought a change in regard to one's self: **and I no longer live**. The self-righteous, self-centered Saul died. Further, death with Christ ended Paul's

enthronement of self; he yielded the throne of his life to Another, to Christ. But it was not in his own strength that Paul was able to live the Christian life; the living Christ Himself took up His abode in Paul's heart: Christ **lives in me**. Yet Christ does not operate automatically in a believer's life; it is a matter of living the new life **by faith in the Son of God**. It is then faith and not works or legal obedience that releases divine power to live a Christian life. This faith, stated Paul, builds on the sacrifice of Christ **who loved us and gave Himself for us**. In essence Paul affirmed, "If He loved me enough to give Himself for me, then He loves me enough to live out His life in me."

2:21. Summing up his case against Peter, Paul declared, **I do not set aside the grace of God**. The clear implication is that Peter and the others who followed him were setting aside God's grace. The essence of grace is for God to give people what they have not worked for (cf. Rom. 4:4). To insist on justification or sanctification by works is to nullify the grace of God. Further, such insistence on legal obedience also means **Christ died for nothing**. If righteousness comes by keeping the Law, the Cross was a futile gesture, the biggest mistake in the universe.

***Dockery, D. S. (1998). The Pauline Letters. In D. S. Dockery (Ed.), Holman Concise Bible Commentary (p. 570). Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers.***

Next Paul described what would have been the decisive opportunity for the leadership of the Jewish church in Jerusalem to correct his gospel of grace if it needed to be corrected. Well over a decade later Paul revisited Jerusalem, accompanied by Barnabas and Titus, a ministry associate, who was a Gentile. If circumcision were really part of the "truth of the gospel," the inner circle of leaders—Peter, John, and James, the half-brother of Jesus—would necessarily have required Titus to be circumcised, especially given the pressure exerted by some Paul called "false brethren." The outcome of this important meeting was apparently full recognition of Paul's gospel message and primary mission field among the Gentiles and a request for Paul and the churches he worked with to continue support of the poor.

A final incident is presented in this section to clear up apparent confusion among Paul's readers. Sometime after the cordial agreement reached in Jerusalem, Peter visited the church in Syrian Antioch, then under the leadership of Paul and Barnabas (Acts 11:26; 13:1). While there, criticism from other Jews who had arrived from the church in Jerusalem pressured Peter into hypocritical behavior. Peter's actions strongly implied that it was necessary for Gentiles to observe Jewish distinctives, although God had decisively taught him at a much earlier point that was not true (Acts 11:1–18). As a result, Paul found it necessary to confront Peter because of his dangerous hypocrisy.

### **GOSPEL MESSAGE (2:15–21)**

This section not only crystallizes the essence of the gospel of grace versus the counterclaims of the Jewish false teachers, but it also serves as a major hinge in the letter. The argument appears to either continue or emerge directly out of Paul's face-off with Peter at the end of the long preceding autobiographical portion. It also prepares for the following exposition of justification by faith alone by stating the central thesis to be proven.

Paul's logic was tight, so as to make his conclusions virtually undeniable. He answered key objections: Jews do not have to sin in the same gross ways as Gentiles to be sinners (Rom. 1–3). Nor does a message of grace provoke more and more sin (Rom. 6:1–14). Having corrected such common misperceptions, the apostle proclaimed that no one can be justified by God by "the



works of the Law,” although the law of Moses does play an important role in convincing of “deadness” in sin (Gal. 3:10–25; Rom. 7:7–12). Rather, the only channel of justification is faith in Jesus Christ, and the road of growth in the Christian is also full identification with the death and resurrection of Christ by faith (5:5).

***Fields, W. C. (1972). Galatians. In H. F. Paschall & H. H. Hobbs (Eds.), The Teacher's Bible Commentary (pp. 742–743). Nashville: Broadman and Holman Publishers.***

### **Paul Defends His Apostolic Authority (Gal. 1:10–2:21)**

*The passage*—Paul reviews the events of his life to show God’s authority in what he is teaching and preaching. God revealed to him that the way of faith has now replaced the requirements of Old Testament laws. This truth did not come to him from any of the apostles. It came through divine revelation. Indeed, the apostles confirmed his work among the Gentiles. They gave approval (“the right hands of fellowship”) to him and his partner, Barnabas. They did not require Titus, a Greek, to be circumcised and become a Jewish proselyte.

The debate on this point indicated in chapter 2 may be the same one which occurred in Jerusalem as described in Acts 15. That discussion ended with Paul having a clear assignment to work among the Gentiles even as Peter and some of the others were to continue witnessing among the Jews.

Thus, Paul claims both human and divine sanction for his teaching that Gentiles are freely saved and fully Christian without going through the motions of Jewish ceremonial law.

*Special points*—When in 2:2 Paul says he went up to Jerusalem “by revelation” he indicates that God had revealed to him that his view of the Gentile converts would be vindicated. Acceptance of Titus as an equal among the believers was proof.

In 2:21 Paul clinches his argument. If a man could get right with God simply by observing the Jewish law, then Jesus died in vain. This is a pivotal statement in the letter. Life through faith in Jesus is liberation. The law stood for judgment and condemnation. Faith stands for forgiveness and freedom. The Galatian Christians, then, are free from the oppressiveness and irrelevance of Levitical law. Paul’s authority in declaring this freedom for Gentile believers has been authenticated.

***The Holy Bible: New International Version. (1984). (Galatians 2:1-21). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.***