November 8, 2026

# THE ONE, TRUE, APOSTOLIC GOSPEL

Galatians 2:1-10

*(4 of 19 in a series through Galatians)*

I mentioned last week that one of the attacks that the Judaizers were most likely making against Paul was claiming that he'd gotten the gospel from the apostles and then likely altered it. According to them, the apostles had told Paul that the gospel required faith in the crucified and risen Lord and obeying the law of Moses, but Paul wasn't happy with that message. Wanting the approval of the Gentiles, he stripped away all the elements related to the law of Moses—especially circumcision—and instead preached that we are justified by faith in the finished work of Christ alone.

Paul countered that likely accusation in 1:11-24 by stating that not only had he not received the gospel from the apostles; he'd not received the gospel from any mere man. Rather, the Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him in the sky as Paul was on his way to Damascus, and the Lord revealed the gospel to him then and there. This is why he was preaching that we're justified by faith in the finished work of Christ alone. It wasn't because he'd received it from the apostles and thought it needed to be altered. It's because he had gotten it directly from the Lord and was simply stating what he'd received from the risen Christ.

But, in making that defense, it does raise the question for the reader, "Did Paul then actually end up preaching the same gospel that the other apostles preached?" I mean, if Paul says he got the gospel from Jesus, and they got the gospel from Jesus, then it would make sense that they'd be able to compare and see they're preaching the same gospel. If anyone were challenging Paul's preaching, showing that his gospel matched what the other apostles were preaching would not only give greater confidence in Paul's message that we're justified by faith and not by works, but it would add further evidence to Paul's claim that he'd gotten the gospel from Jesus just like the other apostles. And that's precisely where Paul moves next in his argument as we begin chapter 2, and he continues to show that the Judaizers are preaching a false gospel to the Galatians.

As Paul picks up the next point in his autobiographical recounting of things, he skips to a time fourteen years after the Lord had saved him. He'd already mentioned a brief visit he'd made to Jerusalem shortly after his conversion, but now he's focusing on another trip where he went to deal with gospel matters. He says in verses 1-2 that he, Barnabas, and Titus went up to Jerusalem "because of a revelation." Now, we don't know exactly when this was or what revelation he was talking about, but it could be the event we heard read earlier in the service from Acts 11:19-30. At that time, Luke writes, some prophets made their way to Antioch (where Paul and Barnabas were) and one of them named Agabus shared that God had revealed to him that a great famine was coming. And so the church at Antioch responded by sending Paul and Barnabas with some relief for the saints in Jerusalem.

This picture fits a few ways. First, this is an occasion where Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem, just like Paul mentions in verse 1 of our text. Second, this visit did indeed come about because of a revelation the Spirit gave to Agabus, just as Paul mentions in verse 2. And, third, if the visit Paul is referring to in our text isn't Acts 11 (but pehaps something like the visit recounted in Acts 15) then it'd be odd for Paul not to note this visit to Jerusalem in Acts 11. After all, he seems to be very careful in noting exactly when he visited Jerusalem. For these reasons, my guess is that the visit to Jerusalem Paul recounts in our text is the visit Luke mentions Paul and Barnabas taking in Acts 11. But, Paul does note something that Luke doesn't mention, namely, that Paul took this as an opportunity to compare the gospel that he'd been preaching with the gospel that the apostles back in Jerusalem were preaching.

Now, why would Paul do this? Why would he feel the need to compare the gospel that he and they were preaching? Well, thankfully, Paul tells us. He says that he went to Jerusalem to "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" (v. 2).

Now, if you've been following along in this letter, this sounds odd. I mean, Paul was certain that the gospel he'd been preaching was the true and only gospel. He tells us that he'd received it directly from Jesus himself. He doesn't give a second of doubt that he'd received the true and accurate gospel. In fact, he was so sure of the gospel he was preaching was the right gospel that he was willing to say that anyone preaching a different gospel should be considered an unbeliever. So, how can Paul make those strong claims and then also say that he wanted to compare the gospel he was preaching to that which the apostles in Jerusalem were preaching "in order to make sure I was not running or had not run I vain"? I mean, doesn't that sound like he had a shred of doubt that he might not be preaching the right gospel?

Well, I don't think that's what he means. I think you can square all that Paul says here about his confidence in the gospel he was preaching and his concern that he might have labored in vain by recognizing that if the apostles in Jerusalem were saying something different, Paul knew that it would destroy the work he'd done through his preaching. In other words, Paul didn't think he might be preaching a false gospel, but he knew that if the apostles disagreed with him, for example, on the need for someone to keep the law in order to be justified, then word would spread, and Paul would be written off. I mean, who are you going to believe got the gospel right: a group of men who'd walked with Jesus for three years or a man who claimed that the risen Jesus Christ appeared to him in the sky? Therefore, no matter how certain Paul was about his gospel, disagreement with the apostles in Jerusalem would have certainly spelled an end to his ministry. Therefore, this was a big moment when Paul went to Jerusalem to "set before them . . . the gospel that [he] proclaim[ed] among the Gentiles" (v. 2). So, what do we then learn from this trip where he went to speak with the apostles in Jerusalem? We learn three things, and the first is that the gospel preached by all the apostles says we're justified by faith in Christ's work alone.

## The gospel preached by all the apostles says we're justified by faith in Christ's work alone

There's one individual I've left out to this point—Titus. Paul mentions that it was not only he and Barnabas who went to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles, but they took Titus along with them. Now, why would Paul do that? Perhaps just as a traveling companion. But my guess is that he took Titus in order that he might be a test case and force the conversation about whether or not someone needs to be circumcised in order to be saved. Let me explain why I say that.

Titus was a Gentile. He had not been circumcised. And the law of Moses made clear that if one were not circumcised, he could not be numbered among the Lord's covenant people. We heard earlier from the covenant God made with Abraham in Genesis 17:14, the Lord stated, "Any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people; he has broken my covenant." So, if you were going to argue that one had to keep the law of Moses in order to be justified, then it meant that one would have to be circumcised. However, Paul says, "But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek [i.e. Gentile]" (v. 3).

Now, this is a big deal for Paul to note this. Had the apostles agreed with the Judaizers, they would have told Titus that he must be circumcised if he wants to be justified before God; merely placing his faith in the crucified and risen Lord isn't enough. But they didn't do that. Why? Because they were preaching the same gospel Paul preached. In fact, Paul mentions down in verse 6 that the Jerusalem apostles "added nothing" to the gospel Paul was preaching. They agreed with Paul that one needed to add nothing to faith in Christ's finished work in order to be justified.

Do you see what a big blow this is to the Judaizers' argument? Not only does Paul say that the apostles in Jerusalem weren't requiring what these false teachers are saying is required, but the whole argument that Paul had distorted the gospel in order to make it more palatable to the Gentiles is eliminated as well. Paul and the apostles in Jerusalem were all preaching the same gospel—the gospel that says that we're declared righteous before God by placing our faith in Jesus and his life, death, and resurrection for us. Nothing else need be added to that. We're justified by faith alone.

For us, this shouldn't strengthen our commitment to proclaim the truth that one is declared righteous before God through faith in the finished work of Christ alone. I know that Roman Catholics and many others preach a different gospel, but the gospel that assures us we're justified by faith in the finished work of Christ alone is the gospel that all the apostles preached. And we must preach this one, true, apostolic gospel and never alter it. In fact, we can say more. We also need to see that we must stand against all who challenge this gospel.

## We must stand against all who challenge this gospel

As Paul was there, meeting with the apostles, some others made their appearance who were up to no good. Paul writes in verses 4-5, "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—to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you."

Now, Paul had mentioned back in verse 2 that this meeting with the apostles was private, and so it wasn't as if some individuals wandering by this public meeting decided to chime in on whether one is justified by faith alone or faith plus works of the law. It seems that some had made their way into this private meeting who were professing believers and perhaps well known to the church in Jerusalem, but Paul says they weren't believers at all. That's what he's implying when he calls them "false brothers." And these were apparently applying pressure for Titus to be circumcised. They were most likely arguing just like the Judaizers—that one must believe and obey the law of Moses to be justified.

And Paul says two things about this. First, he characterizes their efforts as attempting to "bring us into slavery." Now, we'll discuss this more as we continue our way through the book of Galatians, but why did Paul characterize their efforts of trying sneak in works as a basis for salvation as an attempt to bring them into slavery? The reason is because if you're going to put yourself under the law as a means of being declared righteous before God, then you've got to keep the whole law.

The easiest way to think of it is to recognize that God demands perfect righteousness. So, you can go the route of standing on your works of obedience if you want. But you're going to quickly find out that you fall short. You can't be perfectly obedient. And trying to measure up without being able to do so leaves you enslaved in a place of condemnation that you can't break out of. Or, you can trust in Christ and have his perfect righteousness applied to you and be free from the condemnation that you deserve apart from him. Those are your two options—the righteousness of Christ and freedom from condemnation or standing in your own works and never being able to break free from slavery to condemnation. That's how Paul sees their efforts in arguing that we need faith plus works in order to be justified.

Second, we need to recognize that Paul pushed back against this false gospel. He says, "To them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you" (v. 5). Now, when Paul says "we" in that verse I think he's referring not simply to himself and Barnabas but also to the Jerusalem apostles. They all pushed back on this corruption of the gospel. And this is a reminder to us that we must stand against all who would challenge this gospel—whether the challenge comes from obvious unbelievers or from professing brothers.

Every other gospel (indeed, false gospel) simply leaves us enslaved to Satan, sin, death, and condemnation. There is only one gospel that frees. And so, if we allow the gospel to be compromised, we're doing away with the one message that actually saves. And so we fight—not because we merely like to be contentious. We fight because we want the gospel preserved for every other generation that comes along. If we allow the gospel to be corrupted, the saving message of God will be withheld from those who gather here Sunday after Sunday to hear the gospel.

I heard a story a few years back about Gordon Fee that I've probably relayed from this pulpit but it's worth repeating. Gordon Fee was a biblical scholar who was part of the Assembly of God denomination. And the story goes that Fee was on an airplane when someone handed him a little booklet that was promoting the prosperity gospel—the idea that Christians should be free from suffering and poverty and have health and wealth. And the person handed Fee this little booklet, telling him, "You need to write against this and put it to death." So, Fee took the booklet, looked through it, and answered, "There's no need. This is obviously false. It'll never take hold."

Now, I probably don't have to tell you that this so-called prosperity gospel has not only taken hold in numerous charismatic churches in our nation but the majority of some continents seem to be captured by this false ideology. And I've often wondered what would have happened if Fee had decided to address this falsehood for the threat it was in those early days. Perhaps he could have preserved generations from hearing this false gospel and being taken in by it.

We have a crafty and ruthless enemy, and he knows that a little distortion of the gospel is one of the most effective things he can do to keep people shackled in their sin and condemnation. And that's why we push back on false gospels. That's why Paul said that if someone preaches a different gospel, they're under God's wrath. It's actually hard to think of something more damaging than doing a little bit to compromise the gospel message so that it becomes no gospel at all. So, let's stand strong. It's okay to be contentious as we contend for the gospel to be preserved in every generation.

But I don't want to suggest that we become isolationists and merely circle the wagons here. In fact, in verses 6-10 we're reminded that we should be ready to partner with those who preach this gospel.

## We should be ready to partner with those who preach this gospel

Paul begins the last section adding that not only did the Jerusalem apostles add nothing to Paul's gospel, but they recognized that the Lord was creating laborers to make disciples of all nations. Here's what I mean. In verses 7-8 Paul tells us that the Jerusalem apostles recognized that God had raised up Paul to take the gospel to and disciple the Gentiles (i.e. "the uncircumcised") while he'd raised up Peter to labor among the Jews in Jerusalem (i.e. "the circumcised). In other words, this trip that Paul took to Jerusalem shed light on what God was doing to fulfill his saving purposes.

One of the reasons that God had raised up Paul as an apostle to the Gentiles is because he wanted to reach more than merely the Jerusalem apostles could reach. It wasn't that Peter was insufficient for the task the Lord appointed him for. He was faithful in a ministry that focused mainly on the Jews and in Jewish areas. But Peter wasn't sufficient for God's global purpose. That's why he raised up Paul as well. So, this meeting between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles

not only confirmed that they were all preaching the same gospel, but it also opened their eyes to how God was orchestrating his plan of making disciples from all nations.

Therefore, their response was to give "the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and [Paul]" (v. 9). In other words, they formally recognized their partnership in this work of fulfilling the Great Commission together. And though they were going to part ways in this work, with Paul leaving Jerusalem and going back to Gentile areas, they exhorted Paul to remember to help care for the needs of the saints in Jerusalem.

It might feel odd to read verse 10 about these Jerusalem saints exhorting Paul to remember the poor. But I think it makes more sense to recognize that by "the poor" they meant the saints in Jerusalem, who often found themselves in financial need. This is more obvious if the revelation of the famine through Agabus is what prompted this visit in the first place. The church at Antioch already realized the saints in Jerusalem would have needs, and Paul continued this work of faithfully taking up offerings from Gentile believers in order to help the saints in Jerusalem throughout his ministry.

And so if you understand it that way, their partnership is seen even more clearly with the additional note of verse 10. They were acknowledging that they were on the same mission, preaching the same gospel, and committed to upholding and supporting one another. And that is the Lord's design. He didn't give the task of making disciples of all nations so that one local church could fulfill the work. It's going to take partnerships with like-minded, gospel-preaching churches. That's one reason why we aim to raise up, equip, send out, and support men who can plant and pastor churches, and then we partner together with those churches, supporting one another where we can in this task of obeying the Great Commission. This, I believe, is the Lord's design, pictured right here in Galatians 2:1-10.

Whether in Acts 11 or at another moment, the Lord made clear that he wanted Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem, and I'm so grateful he did. It allowed us, now years removed from that event, to see that all the apostles preached the same gospel. There is one, true, apostolic gospel. But we are also reminded from Paul's report of that meeting of the need to stand firm against any who would try to alter this gospel as all the apostles did that that day. And, finally, we're reminded that the Lord's design is to raise up those with whom we can partner in this gospel work as we support each other in our attempts to make disciples of all nations, teaching them to obey the one who lived, died, and was raised for us. Amen.