

Only One Gospel
Galatians 2:1-10
January 23rd, 2022

1. _____ of the gospel confirmed (2:1-2)

2. _____ in the gospel defended (2:3-5)

3. _____ for the gospel encouraged (2:6-10)

Questions for Discussion/Reflection on Galatians 2:1-10

1. What is your approach to conflict? Do you avoid it at all costs? Enjoy it? When is it necessary to take a stand even if it causes a conflict?
2. Read about Barnabas (Acts 4:36-37; 9:26-27; 11:21-26) and Titus (2 Cor. 7:6-7; 8:16-17; Titus 1:4-5). What do we learn about these men in addition to what is listed in Galatians 2? Why would Paul have brought them with him to Jerusalem?
3. (v. 2) What does Paul mean when he says he was afraid that he might have run in vain? (See also Phil. 2:14-16 and 1 Thess. 3:5)
4. (v. 4) How does Acts 15:1-5 help us understand the claims of the “false brethren” in Galatians 2? Why is requiring circumcision such a big deal?
5. What are common ways that Christians/churches limit legitimate freedom among believers? How can we avoid that as a church? (See also Gal. 5:1-2, 15, 19-21)
6. How does Paul describe the leaders in Jerusalem throughout this passage? (see v. 2, 6, 9) Why does he use that language?
7. (vv. 6-9) When the gospel is taken to different people groups with different languages and cultures, what is the unchanging essence of the gospel that cannot be changed? What are practices, expressions, and ministries that can be adapted? How do we know what is unchanging and what is adaptable?
8. (v. 10) Why do you think Paul was asked to remember the poor?
 - a. What negative attitudes can American Christians have toward the poor?
 - b. How do we balance the following passages on poverty: Gal. 2:10; Prov. 10:4; Pro. 10:23; 10:31; 22:9; 2 Thess. 3:10?
 - c. Why is it common for churches to either emphasize care for the poor OR emphasize evangelism and the gospel? Can you think of ways we can better care for the poor in our church and community?

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Big idea: Paul's gospel was independent and identical to the Jerusalem apostles

Intro –

Acts 15 marks a key turning point in the history of Christianity. The year was AD 48 or 49, roughly 15 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus. The gospel has been spreading beyond the borders of the traditional Jewish homeland. It has been spreading beyond the Jewish people dispersed outside the homeland. Gentiles, Greeks who had never studied the Torah were believing in the Messiah promised by the Torah. What would be required of them? Is faith in Jesus enough or do they need to adopt the practices of circumcision, food restrictions, special feasts, sabbath meals, and sacrifices?

To answer the question, a special council was called of the apostles and elders of the early church in Jerusalem. Paul was at that council. Galatians 2 is either about that trip to Jerusalem or one that took place two years earlier. Either way, the same issues were up for discussion.

Acts 15:1 Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."

How can you be saved? That question is timeless and relevant. Why? Because we all know what it is to have a guilty conscience.

Famous story of Arthur Conan Doyle, the author of Sherlock Holmes, who sent a prank telegram to 12 of his friends in London. It was anonymous and simply said, "Flee! All has been discovered!" To his great surprise, all 12 friends fled the country.

How would you respond if your mom said, "I had a call from the school today. Anything you want to tell me?"

How do you feel when the cop car follows behind you on the road? When your boss schedules an unexpected meeting?

We imagine guilt in those setting when it might not even be there.

But here's the thing with our guilty conscience, we *are* guilty before God and we know it. So what do we do about it?

In Paul's day some were saying that the solution was "do more." You need circumcision, at least, but Paul points out later in Galatians that it won't end there.

Galatians 5:2-3 Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.

Why do you have to keep the whole law if you receive circumcision? You're saying, "I need this to be right with God. Jesus isn't enough." Well, then what else do you need? What would you add?

Paul went and stood for the gospel and reported back to the Galatians for them, so the truth of the gospel would remain with them (v. 5).

This wasn't a little debate about theology. This was an issue of life and eternal life. It's an issue that we still wrestle with today.

1. **Accuracy** of the gospel confirmed (2:1-2)

a. Paul traveled to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles who were in Jerusalem.

i. When did this trip happen? Two main options

1. Famine relief trip in Acts 11:30 (Stott, Bruce, George)

2. Jerusalem council trip in Acts 15 (Mac, ESV commentary, Hendriksen, prevailing view)

- ii. If it corresponds with Acts 11, the revelation Paul mentions is from Agabus about the coming famine and the decision to send relief to the area around Jerusalem. On the same trip, he pulled the apostles aside for a private meeting to present to them the gospel he has been preaching so they can confirm it is the same message they are sharing.
 - iii. If it corresponds with Acts 15, then Paul went in obedience to a revelation as well as at the request of the Christians in Antioch. The content of the meeting in Acts 15 sure overlaps with the issue Paul was facing, so it makes sense if they are the same. However, it was an ongoing issue in the early church so we shouldn't be surprised if they were covering similar issues in multiple meetings. We'll proceed assuming it's the same meeting as Acts 15.
 - 1. **Acts 15:1** Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
 - b. "After 14 years" could be after his conversion, after his short visit with Peter/Cephas, or after his work in Cilicia at the end of ch 1.
 - c. His companions were Barnabas and Titus.
 - i. Barnabas was a Jewish Christian active in the early church
 - 1. Acts 4 we see him selling land and bringing the proceeds to the apostles to distribute to those in need.
 - 2. Acts 9 when other Christians are still afraid of Paul because they aren't sure if he is really one of them, Barnabas "took hold" of Paul and brought him to the apostles and they welcomed him.
 - 3. Acts 11 with Paul to bring the famine relief money
 - ii. Titus was a Greek Christian who was also an active participant in the gospel work.
 - iii. These two formed an object lesson for the point Paul was making – whether their background was Jewish or Gentile, whether they had been circumcised or not, the gospel was the same.
 - d. His purpose in going was to submit to the other apostles the gospel Paul was preaching among the gentiles.
 - i. Submit – to lay before someone for consideration.
 - ii. It was not that he had doubts about the accuracy of the message.
 - 1. He has been clear all along that it was given to him directly and independently by Jesus, not the apostles.
 - 2. Rather, it was to silence those attacking his work by saying he brought a different message than the other apostles.
 - 3. The result of the false teachers "winning" would have been that Paul's work would have seemed in vain because the Galatians would have been pulled away from the true gospel to something that diluted the gospel by adding to it things like circumcision.
 - iii. They confirm that the message was independent and identical.
2. **Freedom** in the gospel defended (2:3-5)
- a. Titus was not compelled to be circumcised.
 - i. "See," Paul says, "the Greek Christian with me was welcomed and not compelled by the apostles to be circumcised to be accepted as a fellow Christian."
 - b. False brethren wanted to add the requirements of the law to the condition of faith in Christ for salvation.

- i. **Acts 15:1** Some men came down from Judea and *began* teaching the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved."
- c. Timothy George has a historical note that helps us understand it 2,000 years removed from the original context.
 - i. In the Hellenistic roman period circumcision became more and more prominent as a distinguishing mark of Jewish identity as the people of Israel found themselves in a political environment that grew increasingly hostile. The reign of terror unleashed by Antiochus IV (175-163 bc) included a prohibition of circumcision and a policy by which babies who had been circumcised were put to death along with their mothers who had submitted them to this sign of the covenant. In reaction circumcision was raised to an even higher status as a sign of the election and purity of the nation of Israel.
 - ii. Later believed that the Messiah would only come when the land had been purified of all uncircumcised gentiles. One Judean king in the intertestamental years even had all the people of the land mass circumcised.
 - iii. Converts to Judaism from the gentiles were expected to be circumcised
 - iv. Paul boasted that he was circumcised on the 8th day Phil 3:5, giving witness to the powerful emotion and ideological forces
- d. Because this was the particular challenge to the simplicity of the gospel, circumcision was addressed specifically in Galatians.
 - i. **Galatians 5:2-3** Behold I, Paul, say to you that if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. ³ And I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he is under obligation to keep the whole Law.
 - 1. Why do you have to keep the whole law if you receive circumcision? You're saying, "I need this to be right with God. Jesus isn't enough." Well, then what else do you need? What would you add?
 - ii. **Galatians 6:15** For neither is circumcision anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation.
 - 1. Instead, either circumcised or uncircumcised is fine! Much more important is whether you are a new creation in Christ.
- e. But they would not yield even briefly.
 - i. "We" – Paul, Barnabas, and Titus
 - ii. "Those of reputation" – James, Cephas, and Peter
 - iii. "Them" – false brethren
 - iv. "You" – the Galatian Christians, a mix of Jewish and Gentile backgrounds
- f. The gospel is worth standing on and defending.
 - i. I hate conflict. I don't like feeling like people are mad at me.
 - 1. Over Christmas break we went skiing. The ski hill had a new electronic system for passes that they promised would be much faster and more efficient eventually. That morning, it was a disaster. We were near the front of the slow moving line. When we got to the ticket lady she explained that we needed to go online, create accounts for all of us, pay, and then come back to the line to get a card. Not excited at the thought of waiting through the line again, Sarah asked and the lady said we could just skip the line and come right to the window. After 20 frustrating minutes on my cellphone, I went back outside to get tickets and the line was huge, people were frustrated, and after contemplating standing at the back of the line, I sheepishly followed her instructions,

cut the line, and went straight to the window. I could feel the icy glares from a hundred frustrated skiers and mumbling about people cutting lines. I hated it!

2. But some conflicts are necessary and worth it.
 - a. **2 Timothy 2:24-25** The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, ²⁵ with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth,
 - b. The same Paul who told Timothy not be quarrelsome, said in this situation, he didn't yield even for a moment.
- ii. We want to be a gospel-centered church. On the gospel, we cannot yield.
 1. This was a challenge to gospel doctrine and gospel culture, as people were adding layers of expectation onto others within the body that weren't biblical.
- iii. The gospel is the good news that our guilt can be removed by Jesus. The gospel doesn't pretend we are innocent or pretend that we haven't done anything wrong. Instead it says someone else has lifted that guilt from our shoulders and placed it on Himself – Jesus. If we come to Him honestly about our guilt and believe, He not only forgives the guilt but He replaces it with His own perfect record/perfect life. He does this because He loves you.
- iv. **Galatians 2:20-21** "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."

3. **Partnership** for the gospel encouraged (2:6-10)

- a. Those of "high reputation" agreed with Paul.
 - i. Not demeaning or disparaging or criticizing the Jerusalem apostles at all. Rather he is pushing back against the judaizers who are over emphasizing the authority of the Jerusalem apostles as a way to slight Paul and they are trying to slight Paul to slight the gospel of grace.
- b. Those of high reputation did two things
 - i. They didn't add anything to Paul (v. 6)
 1. To those leading the Galatians astray, if we read Paul's response and infer their accusations, they were likely saying,
 - a. "The pillars, the *real* apostles, those guys we really esteem, they would disagree with this guy Paul."
 - b. "Those guys would tell you what we're telling you, yes you need Jesus but you also need circumcision and the rest of our traditions."
 2. This meeting showed they were wrong. Jesus is enough.
 - ii. They did extend the right hand of fellowship (v. 9)
 1. They recognized that Paul and Peter (the leading Apostle in Jerusalem) were entrusted with the same gospel even though they had different target audiences.
 2. There were not two different gospels –
 - a. Not the gospel of the uncircumcised and the gospel of the circumcised.
 - b. It's a genitive of destination – gospel *for/to* the uncircumcised/circumcised.

- c. There is only one gospel
 - i. Implications for foreign missions and domestic church planting
 - ii. There are differences in style and emphasis. Different awareness of needs.
 - 1. 20 Schemes committed to planting churches in the poorest areas of Scotland might have some different needs on the ground (poverty, drugs) than a church plant in the suburbs outside of Nashville which might have different needs than a rural church in Idaho. There might be different questions if people are coming from a historically Christian nation like England with stone churches that dot the countryside but stand empty on Sundays because people are largely secular and skeptical than our community with a different dominant religious group that brings its own views and presuppositions to the Bible.
 - 2. 70 years ago, Norris Ganstrom's father took the gospel into Cameroon west Africa. There were believers there but he took it further inland. That's the same gospel that Susan Ganstrom is sharing at the Good News Clubs in the local elementary school. It is the same gospel that is being declared through online chat groups in closed countries in Asia.
 - 3. But the gospel and the core need of salvation are unchanging.
- d. Only, remember the poor
 - i. We've often said here at UBC that the benefit of verse by verse preaching is it forces us to deal with the hard passages. We talk about divorce and church discipline and homosexuality because the Bible talks about them. But for some of us, this might be one of those hard passages. Not the part on circumcision. That probably isn't a pressing question for you. But the need to remember the poor. Do we remember the poor?
 - ii. "The poor" probably refers specifically to the poor Christians in Judea who were referred to in the early chapters of Acts and are the recipients of another offering that Paul collected in 2 Corinthians 8-9.
 - 1. There is a special obligation we have to provide for other believers, especially those in our midst. But it's not limited there.
 - 2. **Galatians 6:10** So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.
 - iii. We might wrestle with the best way to help the poor – the role of government, the role of individuals, the role of churches, stimulus checks, workforce training, food dispersals, in what way is the gospel communicated while meeting needs, etc. But do we remember the poor? Do we know people who are poor? Do we see them? Not just notice them but see them and empathize with them? Would they be welcome here? Would you be able to have a conversation with them if their day to day concerns are different than yours? If they are not upwardly mobile?
 - iv. See them. Read about how expensive poverty is and the challenge of getting out.
 - v. Support ministries and programs that meet immediate and long-term needs. Valley Mission in town is renovating the old Metro Health Club to turn it into a mix of crisis care and extended stay with counseling and job training to help people make long-term changes out of intense poverty and homelessness. They can use volunteers mid-week to unload and hand out food boxes. They can use volunteers to help with the demolition and eventual building of their facility.

- vi. We have built up a benevolence fund at UBC. We would love to use it to help needs within our body. Don't be embarrassed if you have needs. Someday you may be on the giving side but right now you might be on the side of having needs.
- vii. I love that this comes in the same passage emphasizing the clarity of the gospel.

4. Conclusion

- a. If the old saying is true that the only sure things are death and taxes, you will die one day. What then? What happens next? Are you ready for the long tomorrow?
- b. The gospel does so much more than prepare you to stand before God one day when you die, but it does not do less than that.

ONLY ONE GOSPEL

GALATIANS 2:1-10

1

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