

## ***ONE GOSPEL***

### ***Galatians 2:1-10***

How is a guilty sinner made just before God? How does a man become a true Christian? The first doctrinal battle ever to be fought in the church was over this issue. While there have been many such battles, this is a very, critical one. The issue first became an occasion of open conflict in the church at Antioch. Under the prompting of the Lord, it was moved to Jerusalem and all of the known leaders of the church were included in the settlement of the issue. Luke gives us an account of the conference in Jerusalem in Acts fifteen. Paul gives us his memory and interpretation of the conference in our text.

This bit of biography is included by Paul for a very specific purpose. He is still laying the case out for his apostleship, and giving the reasons for his commitment to the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith. He wants the believers in Galatia to know that this message is the only message that has ever been acknowledged by the Christians as a whole as the true Gospel. The message being brought to them by the teachers from Judea is contrary to the one gospel that the Lord has given to His churches.

Your appreciation of the Gospel will be enhanced by understanding the page of history that is recorded for us. This is one of the most important events to take place in the history of the world. In this passage we are introduced to the antagonists to the Gospel, and we are told of the agreement about the nature of the Gospel of grace. Let us consider the two separately.

### ***I. THE ANTAGONIST TO THE GOSPEL OF GRACE.***

Antioch was an important church in the early history of the church. It was here that Gentiles first began to accept the Gospel of grace and to be accepted in the church as full members. Barnabas became a part of this ministry very early, and when it outgrew him, he brought in his friend Saul of Tarsus to assist him. Under the capable leadership of these two men and the blessings of the Lord, the church grew wonderfully. Then the tranquility of the church was disturbed by some new teachers who came to Antioch from Jerusalem. They were reported to be Jewish Christians who were Pharisees before they became Christians. This means they had been committed to the strictest interpretations of the Jewish law, and had been very zealous for the law. Paul himself had been of this group before his conversion. They began to present teachings that conflicted with those presented by Saul and Barnabas, and that called into question the practices of the church in Antioch. They taught that one could not be fully just before God unless he was circumcised and observed the rituals that were important to the Jewish religion. Paul and Barnabas had been declaring that faith in Jesus Christ, and His work upon the Cross, was the only way of being just before God. Obviously conflict was in the making.

By some kind of special revelation the Lord instructed Paul to go to Jerusalem for a special consultation about this matter. In the account given by Luke the decision was made by the church. Paul remembers that the Lord made it a matter of special "revelation" (0.2). When they arrived in Jerusalem, Paul had taken along with him a fellow Christian from the work in Antioch who was not a Jew. Titus was a Gentile Christian who had not been circumcised. His presence prompted a response immediately from the teachers who had been contradicting the Gospel of Paul. They began to insist on the circumcision of Titus. They wanted him to submit not only to Jesus Christ in faith, but also the Mosaic law with its burden of rituals. The antagonists were revealed soon. In their confrontation with Paul their true identity is made known.

They are called "false brethren". (v.4). This indicates that they claimed to be Christian ministers. They claimed to be a part of the Christian brotherhood. Paul accuses them of flying under false colors. They are pseudo-Christians. They are not the real article. This should warn us. Any teacher who garbles the basic message of how God justifies sinners is not a true Christian. He is a "false brother". While we need to treat all men with a brotherly kind of love, we need to be careful about whom we acknowledge as true Christian brothers. Unless he speaks clearly that men find righteousness before God by faith in Jesus Christ, and in Him alone --- he is not a brother. If he adds works, circumcision, baptism, or anything else as an essential --- he is a false brother. He is an antagonist of the Gospel.

They are deceptive in their methods. "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privately to spy out our liberty we have in Christ Jesus." The words used by Paul to describe their activities makes clear that they are a deceptive group. Exactly what he is referring to with reference to this group is not clear. Evidently they got into this meeting under some false pretense. It is well for us to remember that this is universally characteristic of those who are antagonistic to the true gospel. They never make their intentions known from the outset. This is also characteristic of the devil --- he works best in the darkness and through deception. In contrast our Lord works best in the light and when all things are known. The Lord Jesus never deceived anyone, nor hid the identity of his purpose. He wanted everything to be known from the beginning.

The ultimate goal of these antagonists is bondage. They were bent upon the destruction of the liberty enjoyed by the Gentile Christians. They wanted them to become shackled with the rules and regulations and rituals of the Old Testament law. They were pressing upon them the law of Moses instead of the work of Christ as a means of being justified before God. The only message that brings a real freedom to man is the message that the work of Christ is sufficient for our salvation. All other messages leave man bearing some kind of unbearable burden,

or walking with shackles on him. Most of us have not begun to appreciate the nature of the that is ours in Christ. Just to look toward God, and to know that everything that must be done to make me just before God has been done by the Lord Jesus, and that I have nothing else to do in order to earn salvation is a blessed freedom. Do you know this? This means that I am free to do whatever I do toward God out of my Love and devotion to him --- not out of some burdensome sense of obligation.

You will notice that Foul's reaction to the contentions of these antagonists was immediate and firm. Be opposed with all of his being any attempt on their part to get Titus to do anything besides trust in Jesus Christ for salvation. So we should always be ready to contend with those who would pervert the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

## ***II. THE AGREEMENT ABOUT THE GOSPEL OF GRACE.***

The outcome of the conference in Jerusalem was so critical. In the public meeting of the church, Flu! and Barnabas rehearsed the workings of God in their lives with the church. They told of the many conversions and of the signs which had accompanied their work in the Gentile communities. It must have been a thrilling story- Then Simon Peter recounted with t4e group how God had dealt with him concerning the Gentiles in Caesarea. He had been led to share the Gospel with the household of Cornelius, only to have the group he saved as they responded to his message. God had taught him the same thing he had confirmed through Barnabas and Paul. Men are made clean through their faith in Christ apart from the work of the law. James then became the spokesman for the group. The battle was won for the Gospel of grace.

They agreed that a mar can become a true Christian by faith in Christ alone. This agreement was expressed symbolically when they welcomed the uncircumcised Titus into their fellowship as a true Christian. They did not insist on him being circumcised or observing any of the rituals of the old order. Rather they agreed that when he placed his faith in Christ as Lord and Saviour, he had received a full and complete salvation from the Lord Jesus. Whom you will accept as a true Christian says as much about your understanding of the Gospel as what you say when your preach. The church leaders at Jerusalem welcomed this Gentile brother, and thus affirmed their understanding that men are saved by faith. This was tremendous victory for the Gospel of grace.

Another important agreement was made there. They agreed that they knew only one gospel message --- that of salvation by grace through faith. And that this was the message that must be shared with all men. "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision." This "right hand of fellowship" was

a significant gesture on the part of these church leaders in Jerusalem. What they did was publicly acknowledge Paul and Barnabas as equal partners in the task of the taking the Gospel to the world. It was something of a public covenant between the two groups that Peter would preach the Gospel to the Jews around Jerusalem, but Paul and Barnabas would center their activities among the Gentiles wherever the Lord might lead them. The references to the "gospel of the circumcision" and the "gospel of the uncircumcision" is not a reference to two different gospels. "Circumcision" and "uncircumcision" simply identify the address of the Gospel. They were delivering the Gospel to these diverse groups. The difference was in the audience --- not in the message.

This is an important insight for us to recognize. God has never given to His people but one message concerning salvation. This message declares that Jesus Christ did everything necessary for our salvation through his death and resurrection, and that we receive the required righteousness as a gift when we place our faith in Him, and in Him alone. This is the message for adults and for children. This is the message for the white and the black. This is the message for the good and the bad.

One of the great misunderstandings of our day is that only the very bad need the death of Christ upon the Cross for their sins. That those who live good, moral lives are able to make it on their own. I have heard this affirmed on more than one occasion by men who should have known better. Friend, there is just one Gospel. There is only one way of finding the required righteousness. You and I must both receive it as a faith gift from the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Conclusion:***

The lesson that burns its way into my heart from this passage is that I need to be careful about refusing Christian fellowship to some man on the basis of externals. A man is my Christian brother if he is trusting in Christ in Him alone for salvation. I must not exclude one from my circle of fellowship that God has already included.

Second, I have the message which my sphere of influence needs. The Gospel is the message for my world --- whatever the nature of my world. It is the message for your world. We need to make it known that Christ and Christ alone saves.