

Paul's Gospel Ministry Confirmed, Part 2

Scripture: Galatians 2:1–10

Code: 48-8

Before we look at the book of Galatians I want you to just listen for a moment as I read from Paul's final letter. Book of Galatians was the first letter that Paul wrote, most likely, and it is a defense of the gospel. At the very beginning of his ministry, the very first time he picks up a pen under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he writes to defend the gospel: the gospel as revealed by Jesus through the apostles, and to him as well; the true and only gospel. He is its great defender. That's how he began his writing ministry in the New Testament.

The last book that he wrote is 2 Timothy; and in 2 Timothy, he is passing on the responsibility for the gospel for its preaching, and its protection, and its preservation to his son in the faith Timothy. And listen to what he says to him in 2 Timothy chapter 1, verse 11: "The gospel for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher. For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day." Paul is saying, "I trust God to guard my eternal soul. I've entrusted to Him my eternal soul, the one in whom I have believed. And I am convinced that He will guard that trust until that day," that is the day, the final day, the end of all things when the Lord comes to reign and rule. "I know the Lord will guard what I have entrusted to Him: my soul."

Then he says to Timothy in verse 13, "Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Don't alter the doctrine. Retain the standard of sound words you have heard from me. Do it in faith and love in Christ Jesus." And then this in verse 14: "Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."

Paul says, "I know God will guard the treasure of my soul which I have entrusted to Him. And, Timothy, I want you now to guard the treasure of the gospel which He has entrusted to you. This is a stewardship. This is a responsibility given to the preacher from heaven, to be a guardian of the gospel, the treasure entrusted to us."

Of all the apostles, and maybe of all the preachers ever, no one was more intent on guarding the gospel than Paul: guarding the accuracy of the gospel, guarding the clarity of the gospel, and guarding the priority of the gospel. It was always about the gospel. What is the gospel? It is the message from heaven, the good news – that's what gospel means, the good news that the one true living God – and there is only one – who is holy and sovereign will forgive sinners and grant them reconciliation with Himself and eternal life if they put their trust in His Son Jesus Christ. That is the gospel. That is the one true gospel.

Now Paul uniquely was called for the purpose of proclaiming and defending that gospel. In fact, in Philippians he says that he was set by God for the defense and confirmation of the gospel. We've been saying that it's critical that we get the gospel right, because this is the reason the church exists in the world, to preach the gospel to every creature, so people can hear, believe, and be saved and

brought to eternal glory. Every preacher like the apostle Paul is to be set for the defense of the gospel. We are to make the gospel clear, we are to proclaim the gospel accurately, and we are to make the gospel the priority.

Now Paul was absolutely sure of one thing to start with, and that was that the gospel came down from heaven, that the way of salvation had to come from God, the one who was offended by all the lawbreakers in His world. He knows the divine origin of the gospel. The gospel is what it is because God has said so. It is not subject to human emendation, change, alteration, or replacement. In fact, anyone who tampers at all with the gospel, in chapter 1 of Galatians, verses 8 and 9, is cursed, damned, consigned to divine destruction.

The gospel is what God says it is. That is why Paul refers to it as the gospel of God, or the glorious gospel of the blessed God, or the gospel of Christ, or the gospel of the glory of Christ. Yes, it is the gospel of peace. Yes, it is the gospel of salvation. But it is the gospel that comes from God and from Christ for the glory of God and the glory of Christ. And though there are many titles, such as I've indicated to you, there's only one gospel. Paul even calls it "my gospel," not because it came from him, but because it came to him to be preached and to be defended.

Now all of Paul's letters – and he wrote thirteen letters in the New Testament – all of them feature the gospel. They all focus on this defense of and confirmation of the gospel. They're all about the clarity of the gospel, the accuracy of the gospel, the priority of the gospel, and the defense of the gospel. Let me give you a little bit of a review.

He wrote the great book of Romans, sixteen chapters, the longest of his epistles. Romans is a systematic presentation of the gospel in logical order embracing all the doctrines contained in the gospel. And then there is 1 Corinthians. In 1 Corinthians, Paul defends the gospel against the corruptions being smuggled in by human wisdom and carnal thought. And then there is 2 Corinthians. In 2 Corinthians, Paul addresses and assaults the false teachers, the heretics who try to subvert the gospel; and in chapter 5 gives a clear proclamation of the gospel and tells the church that we are ambassadors to proclaim that gospel to the world.

In the book of Ephesians, Paul presents a simple, straightforward revelation of gospel truth, emphasizing in particular that the gospel is entirely the work of God, and that salvation in every individual case is the work of God. In Philippians, he gives a contrast between the corrupters of the gospel and the true testimony which he himself gives summarizing the heart of the gospel. Those who are the corrupters are dogs. He, the true preacher of the gospel has received the righteousness of God as a gift, not by works, but by faith alone in Christ.

In the book of Colossians, he addresses again all attempts to add human elements and human contrivances to the gospel that corrupt its divine simplicity. In 1 Thessalonians, he speaks of the power and the assurance of the gospel in the believer's life, and the promise to deliver the believer from the wrath of God. That's what the gospel ultimately does. In 2 Thessalonians, he speaks of the consummation of the gospel at the return of Jesus Christ. First and Second Timothy, he gives instruction to pastors, to faithfully safeguard – as we read – and preach the gospel.

In Titus, Titus, a simple letter directed to a man who had responsibility for the gospel; and in Titus, he gives a magnificent summary of the gospel in chapter 2 – it's worth reading. It starts in verse 11. "For

the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds.” A summary of the gospel. So whether you’re reading Romans, or 1 and 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, it’s going to be about the gospel.

There’s another little letter by the name of Philemon. Philemon was a slaveowner whose slave had run away. In Paul’s one-chapter letter to Philemon, he celebrates the relational power of the gospel, to bring two, who were in a position of alienation, together in reconciliation. And in that book of Philemon gives a beautiful picture of imputation when he says, “Impute Philemon. Please impute Onesimus’ sins to my account,” which is exactly what God has done in our behalf, imputing our sins to Christ.

Everything Paul wrote was about the gospel. It was the heart of his life. In Romans, he says, “I have to preach the gospel;” – why? – “it is the power of God unto salvation. I’m not ashamed of the gospel.” To the Corinthians he says, “Necessity is laid upon me. Yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel.” He says, “I preach Jesus Christ alone and Jesus Christ crucified. I’m determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ and Him crucified.” And because he was relentless in his proclamation of the gospel, the agents of Satan, the emissaries of hell, the detractors, the liars, and the deceivers, the false teachers dogged his steps as opposition to the gospel which he preached.

But he was faithful to the very end. Second Timothy, as I said, was his last letter; and his final words as he signs off at the end of his ministry as a prisoner about to have his head cut off are these: “I’m already being poured out as a drink offering. The time of my departure has come.” And here’s his own postmortem on his life: “I have fought the good fight. I have finished the course. I have kept the faith.” He protected the faith, he proclaimed the faith, he lived the faith; and it was a battle, it was a war. It was anything but easy to survive the onslaughts that came at him.

He says to the Corinthians: “I have been in far more labors, far more imprisonments, beaten times without number, often in danger of death. Five times I received from the Jews thirty-nine lashes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked. A day and a night I spent in the deep. I’ve been on frequent journeys and dangers from rivers, dangers from robbers, dangers from my countrymen, dangers from the Gentiles, dangers in the city, dangers in the wilderness, dangers on the sea, dangers among false brethren.”

And you can add labor and hardship without food, and all the cares of the church on top of that. He was assaulted constantly in his life, but he was a true warrior. He had put on the armor of God; he wore it. He did what we heard Tom read earlier: he submitted to the Commander, he took the orders the Commander gave him, he went into battle without flinching, and he ended in triumph.

Now the world might look at him and say, “Well, if you end all by yourself as a prisoner in Rome, and everybody has forsaken you,” – by his own admission that was true; he was all alone – “and you end up having your head chopped off, that seems like a defeat.” But Paul would say, “It’s not a defeat; for there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord the Righteous Judge will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

He died triumphant. Oh, there was no one there to hail him. There was no great celebration. There was no banquet in his honor. Everybody had forsaken him, except a very few. But it was a triumphant end, because at the end he could say, "I fought the good fight; I finished the course; I kept the faith." That's how all ministers of the gospel need to end. They don't, but they should.

He was a warrior to the very end. It was a fight. It's always a fight against the lies. It's always a fight against the spiritual enemy, the powers of Satan and demons, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies. It's always a battle against deceivers. It's always a battle against false brethren, false teachers, false prophets, false gospels – always a battle.

Now what about Galatians? What is Paul saying about the gospel in Galatians? We looked at the other twelve books; what is he saying about the gospel in Galatians? Primarily this: that salvation, salvation by grace is received by faith alone, by faith alone. That is the primary message of Galatians. Of course, it's all through this writings everywhere. But the primary focus of Galatians is to make sure that no one adds works to faith as a means of salvation.

Go to chapter 3 – this is at the heart of this letter, right about in the middle – chapter 3, verse 6: "Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." So Paul is saying, "It's always been by faith, it's always been by faith, and by faith Abraham believes, and righteousness is credited to him. It's not his righteousness, it's God's accredited it to him because he believed." That's always been the case as far back as Abraham. "Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham." The true sons of Abraham, spiritual sons of Abraham are not the Jews. The true sons of Abraham are the people who come to God for salvation by faith.

"The Scripture," – verse 8 – "Foreseeing that God would justify the nations or Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham, the believer." What is the gospel preached beforehand to Abraham? The just that live by faith, believe, and righteousness is credited to you. That is the gospel message.

On the other hand, verse 10 says, "As many as are of the works of the law" – who think you can be saved by law – "are cursed; for it is written, 'Cursed is everyone who doesn't abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.'" The only way you can be saved by the law is to keep all of it all the time your entire life. No one can do that. Therefore, verse 11: "No one is justified by the law before God, that is evident; for, 'The righteous man shall live by faith.'" That comes from the prophet Habakkuk in chapter 2 in the Old Testament.

So the message of Romans, the full, wondrous panoply of the gospel, and then all the other Epistles, you have elements of the gospel being featured. And now you come to the last book that Paul writes, 2 Timothy, and he says, "I'm faithful to the gospel to the very end." And going back to the beginning – the first one, Galatians – it was all about salvation by faith alone. Why? Because the Jews had twisted true Jewish religion from believing God, and receiving His righteousness credited to you by faith, which was true of Abraham and all the true saints of the Old Testament. They had twisted it into a works-righteousness system which was really propagated by the kingdom of darkness, and nation Israel was apostate far from God. And Jesus came, and they would not accept the true Messiah or His true gospel; and judgment came down on them in massive force by the Romans in the

destruction of Jerusalem. That judgment continues on the Jewish people to this day who will reject Christ and salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

The question that religion has to ask: “How can a person be right with God? How can a person be right with God?” That is why there is religion to answer the question. The only answer is there is one God, and He says there is only one way to be right with Him, and that is through faith in His Son, His person, and His work, His death, and resurrection.

Paul preached that gospel. We read it earlier in Romans 3:21 to 26. He preached that gospel in Galatia. He preached it since the day that he was converted on the Damascus Road in the ninth chapter of Acts; he had been preaching that gospel. By the time we get to chapter 2 of Galatians, he’s been preaching that gospel for seventeen years. Many had believed. Many had been saved. Many had come into the churches that he established. They had received the Holy Spirit, the down-payment on final glory. They had been brought together to make up the living church, the body of Christ.

In Galatia in particular, the region of Galatia to whom this letter is addressed, he had founded a church in Lystra, Derbe, Iconium, and Antioch of Pisidia. There were many believers in these churches. He went there on his first missionary journey and established the churches. He went back on his second journey; back again on his third journey. These churches all came into existence by hearing the true gospel. They became children of God. They received the Holy Spirit; they were living in the power of the Holy Spirit; they were walking in the Spirit. They were experiencing love, joy, peace, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, self-control – all the things that he talks about later in Galatians.

Yet in the midst of all of that flourishing spiritual life, in come these Jews who claimed to be believers in Christ from Jerusalem; and they were saying to the churches in Galatia – not just there, but everywhere Paul went they followed him and did this. But for the sake of Galatia, you need to know they came there as well. They came into the churches and said, “Paul is not a true apostle. He’s not telling you the truth. You can’t be saved unless you’re circumcised – physical operation – you’re circumcised, and you maintain the ceremonies of Moses and the ancestral traditions. You have to keep the law. Yes, we believe in grace. Yes, we believe in faith. But also law. Salvation is by both.”

That could not undo the salvation of true believers. Nothing can take away their salvation. But apparently it began to confuse them about the true gospel. That’s a problem, because if they don’t know the true gospel, and they don’t fight for the true gospel and defend the true gospel, they can’t proclaim the true gospel; and if they don’t proclaim the true gospel, they have no reason to be in the world. That’s why the church is here, to fulfill the Great Commission, to preach the gospel to the whole world.

So what does Satan want to do? Well, first of all, he wants to prevent people from hearing the true gospel and being saved. Secondly, he wants to take believers who have already believed the gospel and been saved, and convince them that they’re a little bit too tight on the gospel.

I remember meeting in the private office of a man who was the pastor at the time of the largest church in America, and he wanted to confront me about the things that I believe regarding the gospel. And at the end of our conversation, which was an amiable conversation – I had known him

for awhile – he said to me, “You know, MacArthur, you just need to lighten up.” I said, “I don’t even know what you’re saying. I have no idea what you just said. What do you mean? You mean take hell less seriously? What do you mean: take sin less seriously; take the death of people, eternal judgment less seriously; take the gospel less seriously? What are you talking about, ‘Lighten up’?” But that is the mood of the church today, to accommodate everybody.

Just before I came in here, somebody showed me a statement that I had made on an iPad that said, “John MacArthur says that the orthodox church rejects the true gospel.” Of course they reject the true gospel. Absolutely they reject the true gospel. They have a gospel of works.

That’s not okay with many people today. Many “Christian” people, we have these kind of Judaizing folks around today who want to tamper with the gospel. They want to lighten it up, loosen it up, because they don’t want the offense that comes with it, they don’t want the rejection that comes with it, they don’t want the hostility that comes with it; and they do want the popularity that comes with finding a compromising message that people are willing to accept. But anything that alters the gospel comes from the darkness. It comes from the darkness.

So here they come, these false teachers, into Galatia; and they go into the churches, and they begin to confuse the believers that Paul has poured his life into. He writes this letter to get them to the point where they are crystal clear on the gospel by faith alone, apart from any works.

Now why should they believe him? Why should they believe him? Who is he? Well, he is an apostle, and he has declared that to them. He has told that to them. So the Judaizers who come in – they’re called Judaizers, because they wanted to Judaize the Gentiles and take them back through Judaistic patterns in order to legitimize their salvation. The Judaizers attack him and say, “He’s not telling you the truth. He’s not a real apostle. He’s not the authority. You can’t trust Paul. We’re the ones who have the truth.” And by professing to believe in Christ, they had gained an entrance.

So in this letter, he demands that believers reject false teachers, false gospels, no matter what they are or who advocates them, necessarily since there’s no New Testament, they have to believe him, because he is the apostle of the true gospel. So he has to defend his apostleship, which he does in chapters 1 and 2; and that’s where we are.

Okay, let’s go to chapter 2. I always feel like I need to go all the way back through everything, but I’m going to resist that.

They’re saying that Paul has an illegitimate claim to apostleship, and he has an illegitimate gospel. So his initial answer to that in chapter 1 is, “I am an apostle,” – verse 1 of chapter 1 – “and not from men, nor through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead.

In verse 11 of chapter 1, he says, “I would have you know, brethren, that the gospel which was preached by me is not according to man. I neither received it from man, nor was I taught it. I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. My apostleship came from Christ, and my message came from Christ.”

Remember what we saw? He was converted on the road to Damascus when Jesus encountered him

there: struck him blind, knocked him down. Three days later he receives his sight, and immediately he is sent to Arabia for three years. He goes to Arabia, Nabataean Arabia, and he spends three years there being instructed by Jesus. He has seen no apostle, met no apostle. He has three years of private tutoring by Jesus.

That's what the disciples had. The original twelve spent three years with Him, so Paul gets his three years in a private tutorial in the desert. For those three years Jesus gives him the gospel and divine truth out of His own mouth straight from heaven. So he is saying, "Look, I am an apostle. I was called by God, I saw the risen Christ on the Damascus Road, and I spent three years with Him as He personally instructed me in the gospel."

"It was only after three years" – he said in chapter 1 – "that I even went to Jerusalem and met the apostles. I went there for fifteen days; and I met Peter, and I met Barnabas; and that struck up a friendship that continued. But I wasn't taught by them; I wasn't there long enough to be taught by them. I didn't get my message from them. And it got dangerous for me there, because they started preaching there, and they wanted me to get out of town because it was so dangerous. They sent me back to where I came from, Syria and Cilicia, and I was there for the next fourteen years," he says at the beginning of chapter 2.

Now that's the biographical data. Converted on the Damascus Road; blinded; eventually receives his sight. Sent to the desert, three years tutored by Christ. Comes back after three years. Goes to Jerusalem for a couple of weeks; wants to meet Peter. Finds Barnabas, who becomes a companion in the future. Is sent away because of persecution. Goes back and spends fourteen years in ministry, fourteen years: planting churches in Syria, planting churches in Cilicia, planting churches in Galatia on his first missionary trip. During that fourteen years he did make one visit to Jerusalem, recorded in Acts 11 and 12, and that's when he brought money from the church at Antioch down to Jerusalem because there was a famine in Jerusalem, and the people in the church needed food and he brought resources to them: money, perhaps even some food. But apart from going to meet Peter for a couple of weeks, bringing food as a matter of relief to the Jerusalem church from the church at Antioch, he hadn't spent any time at all in Jerusalem, not at all.

Now as we come to chapter 2, he comes to Jerusalem after a total of seventeen years, and went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and also Titus. So we saw his coming last time. We saw his companion Titus; that's very, very important.

"Titus was with me. He was a Gentile, a Greek, not a Jew." And here's the important thing to note, that he's telling the Galatians, "I brought Titus. We went to Jerusalem. When we got to Jerusalem we were in the mother church; we were there with the apostles. We were there actually at the Jerusalem Council." – recorded in Acts 15 when the apostles were gathered together – "We were there at that time, and none of them compelled Titus to be circumcised. Nobody brought that up that he was needing to be circumcised or he couldn't be a true Christian."

That's the first affirmation of the apostles on Paul's authority and Paul's apostleship and Paul's gospel. He obviously had the right gospel, the same one that the leaders of the Jerusalem church had; and it didn't include circumcision and law-keeping, or ceremonies. "The only reason this was an issue" – he says in verse 4 – "is because of the false brethren secretly brought in by Satan, sneaking in to spy out our liberty, our freedom, which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. All the legalists want to do is bring us into bondage."

So we see his coming, we see his companion Titus who is not required to be circumcised, and we see that there is a discussion when he gets there about this whole issue. This is exactly where the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 takes place. The Judaizers are there, the apostles are there, the church is there, the elders are there, the leaders are there, and they talk about the gospel and the law. And what comes out of that Acts 15 council, the only church council recorded in the book of Acts, is they reject the law, they reject circumcision, they reject any works at all, and they affirm the gospel of grace and faith. That's what happened in that council.

Paul sums it up in verse 5 by saying this: "We did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, even a moment." Who's them? "The Judaizers, the ones" – in verse 4 – "who were spying out our liberty. The one whom Satan had brought in, who had sneaked in, and who were trying to bring us into bondage. We did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour," – why? – "so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you."

It was down to this: "What is the gospel? Is the gospel circumcision and law-keeping and faith? Is it the gospel of the Judaizers? Are they right? Is that the gospel that would remain with you, or is the gospel the gospel of grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone apart from works?"

The Jerusalem Council decided for the true gospel. They did it visibly by not compelling Titus to be circumcised. They did it officially by drawing up a document that's recorded in Acts 15 that lays it out that you do not make Gentiles go through any acts, rituals, rights, ceremonies, traditions, as if that is a necessity for salvation. We have been set free in Christ. Don't let anybody put you back into bondage. Here were these believers who had already been set free by Christ, and now these false teachers are causing them to wander back as if they're going to be in the old covenant again from which they'd been delivered.

Listen to Romans 8, verse 1: "There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." So you're in Christ Jesus, you're in Christ; that spiritual union there is no condemnation. No one can condemn you. That means they can't condemn you for doing something or not doing something, because you're in Christ. All your sins and all your failures are already forgiven.

"For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death." The Mosaic law, the ritual law is a law of sin and death. It is a law that defines sin and pronounces death. That's what the law does: it defines sins, it pronounces death. You've been set free from that law.

"For what the law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but the Spirit."

So understand it this way: When Christ died, you died in Christ. When Christ rose, you rose in Christ. Christ perfectly fulfilled the law, and you have fulfilled the law in Christ. He has fulfilled the law on your behalf. He died on your behalf; He rose on your behalf. He lives in complete, perfect conformity to the law of God on your behalf as a believer. "Do not let anybody take you back into a yoke of slavery." That's Galatians 5:1, isn't it. "Keep standing firm." It was freedom, for freedom that Christ set us free. "Keep standing firm. Do not be subject again to a yoke of slavery." In the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15:10, they called it a "yoke around your neck." Salvation is by faith alone.

Listen, it is impossible to be a Christian and a legalist. Chapter 5, verse 2: “I, Paul, say to you, if you receive circumcision, Christ will be of no benefit to you. I testify again to every man who receives circumcision, that he’s under obligation to keep the whole law. You have been severed from Christ, you who are seeking to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.”

It is impossible to be a legalist and a Christian. It is impossible – let me say it practically – to believe that you have to do something that contributes to your salvation, and at the same time, be a Christian. If you think your morality, your religiosity, your baptism contributes to your salvation or is in any part necessary, you can’t be a Christian; you’ve fallen from grace. This is about the gospel. This is about the truth of the gospel remaining with you.

So that brings us down to verse 6. We have seen his coming and his companion Titus; we know what the issue is. Here’s his commission. What did he want? Why did he really come? He wants the affirmation of the apostles. The Judaizers are hammering on him. He defended himself, in chapter 1, by his own experience with Christ; now he’s going to defend himself in chapter 2 by the apostles affirmation.

“But from those” – verse 6 – “who were of high reputation, high reputation” – influential men, the somebodies. They’re called the pillars of the church down in verse 9, and even identified in part as James the brother of our Lord; Cephas, who is Peter; and the apostle John. “From those who were of high reputation,” – he says – “(what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) – well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.” In other words, he says, “I went there. I met those apostles,” – Peter and John – “I met the brother of the Lord who’s the head of the Jerusalem church, James. They basically made no difference to me.”

You say, “Well, wait a minute. Is that a lack of respect?” No. It is a way to say this: “It doesn’t matter who you are. It doesn’t matter who you are. What matters is that you’re faithful to the truth.

Do you remember what he said back in verse 8? “Even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he’s to be accursed! I don’t care if he comes in robes; I don’t care if he comes in clerical garb. I don’t care if he comes with theological education; I don’t care if he comes with biblical knowledge. It’s not about a person. It doesn’t matter to me who they are in the sense of the gospel. It’s about the truth. Makes no difference to me.”

“God is no respecter of persons,” Acts 10:34. It’s never about persons. Jesus said this: “Who is My mother, who is My brother, who is My sister, but the one who does the will of My Father.” It’s not about people. It’s not about position.

Look, I am simply a preacher, nothing more. I have no authority. I have absolutely zero authority in the world. My education gives me no authority. My mind gives me no authority. My experience gives me no authority. I have zero authority as a leader of a church. My position gives me no authority. The only authority that exists is that authority that comes from God through His Word; and I only pass on the divine authority to you.

I have no authority. You could dress me up in robes, put a cone hat on my head, put all kinds of fancy stuff on me, give me golden sticks to wave, and I have no more authority than this pulpit sitting

here inanimate. I have no authority. You could call me pope, patriarch, cardinal, bishop, doctor; that gives me nothing.

Paul says, "It's not about people. They don't add anything to me; I don't add anything to them. It's not about persons." But here's what they concluded, verse 7. It wasn't about persons, "But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel."

Now let me stop there and say that's the treasure. That trust Paul was given, he passed to Timothy: "The things you've heard from me, the same commit to faithful men who'll be able to teach others also. "They knew, they saw, they recognized that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the circumcised. They saw Peter and myself as equal."

Listen, it is bizarre to think about it; but there are those who think Peter preached one gospel and Paul a different one. There's one gospel to the circumcised. It's not the gospel of the circumcised, and it's not the gospel of the uncircumcised. It's the gospel to the circumcised and to the uncircumcised, but it's just one gospel. In verse 7 there's just one gospel, entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, as Peter to the circumcised.

It's never about people. It's not about who I am. It's not about who Peter is, who James is, who John is, or anybody else. It's about the gospel. And they saw it. "It was the same gospel, and I had been called to give it to the uncircumcised, and Peter had been called to give it to the circumcised." Two worlds: the Jewish world, the Gentile world. These are what we call objective genitives. The genitive receives the action: the gospel to the uncircumcised, the gospel to the circumcised. It's the one gospel. And any other gospel brings a curse.

And then I love this. Verse 8 takes it a step further. "For He," – that's the Holy Spirit – "for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles." The same Holy Spirit that empowered Peter from the Day of Pentecost on, as he preaches his way through the early chapters of Acts, and thousands and thousands of people are converted, "The same power in Peter as an apostle is the power in me. We have the same gospel. We have the same Holy Spirit. No difference."

Verse 9: "They recognized the grace that had been given to me. They recognized the grace that had been given to me." This is a blow. This is the blow, final blow to the Judaizers. They didn't want Titus to be circumcised; wasn't required. They recognized that the gospel that Paul preached was exactly what Peter preached. They recognized that the power of the Holy Spirit that had been manifest in the ministry of Peter in Jerusalem and Judea had been manifest in Paul all through the Gentile world; people were being converted. They both possessed the same gospel, were empowered by the same Holy Spirit. There is no difference in message, there is no difference in power between Peter and Paul, and this decision was affirmed officially.

Verse 9: "James," – the brother of our Lord, the head of the Jerusalem church – "and Cephas," – or Peter – "and John. They were the ones reputed to be the pillars. They were the main leaders of the church, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship." We talk about that sometimes, don't we? That's where it comes from. What is that? Affirmation, confirmation, support.

Paul says in 1 Corinthians 9:17, “A stewardship was committed to me. A stewardship was committed to me.” He also says in Corinthians that it’s required of stewards that a man be found faithful. He was faithful all the way to the end: fought the good fight, finished the course, kept the faith. Only grace accounts for his ministry.

Notice that phrase at the beginning of verse 9, “recognizing the grace that had been given to me.” It’s the grace of the calling, the saving calling on the Damascus Road. That was all grace – wasn’t it? – out of nowhere. It was grace that called him to be an apostle. It was grace that taught him for three years. It was grace that empowered him. It was grace that produced the results. It’s all of grace.

If anything happens by the preaching of any pastor or any preacher, if anything ever happens as a result of anything I’ve ever said anywhere, anytime throughout my entire life, it isn’t because of me, it’s because of the grace that has been given to me. It is the grace that touches the souls of people. It is from heaven that all change takes place.

Only God’s grace accounts for the spread of the gospel. Only God’s grace accounts for the founding and growth of the church. Only God’s grace accounts for the power of the Word of God to transform lives.

So that’s the section I like, between verses 6 and 9, so much, because it frames his commission. He is an apostle. He preaches the same gospel Peter preached. He functions by the same power Peter had. And we all know the power of Peter on the Day of Pentecost, the power that came through the message there: three thousand saved, thousands and thousands and thousands more as the days and weeks went on. He is therefore validated by the Jerusalem church and its leaders.

You see, lastly, his commendation. “They gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” They affirmed exactly what God had called to do. That was his call. You must remember way back in chapter 9 just a brief comment on that.

He was going to preach to the Gentiles, he was sent by the Lord to do just that, and he did. He began proclaiming Jesus saying, “He is the Son of God.” That’s why the Lord called him.

Verse 15 of Acts 9: “The Lord said to him, ‘Go. He’s a chosen instrument of Mine, to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and the sons of Israel; and I’ll show him many things he’ll have to suffer.’” His commendation is given, and he is recommissioned officially by the Jerusalem leaders to go back to the calling the Lord had given him.

They do ask him to do one thing. This is the final blow against the Judaizers. They don’t say, “By the way, could you get Titus baptized? Could you get Titus circumcised? Could you do just this or that or the other kind of observances?” No. The only thing they asked was to remember the poor, verse 10: “That’s all they asked: remember the poor,” – that’s it – “the very thing I also was eager to do.” And if you study the life of Paul, he did that constantly in his ministry, constantly.

That was true in the early church, wasn’t it? They were having all things in common, and when somebody had a need, somebody would sell something – chapter 2 of Acts – and they’d distribute it to those who had need. Early in the book of Acts in the sixth chapter, there were widows that didn’t

have enough, and there were people appointed to make sure that the folks who had more than enough could get it to the folks who had not enough; and they were ministering to the saints. When it says “remember the poor,” it means the poor saints. Paul had done that in the middle of the fourteen years at some point. He came down with relief for those in the famine in Judea.

Do you remember the end of Romans chapter 15:26-27? “For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make a contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.” Paul on his missionary journey always had the poor saints in Jerusalem in his mind.

Why were there so many poor saints in Jerusalem? Here’s the answer very quickly. On the Day of Pentecost, there were literally hundreds of thousands of Jews that came from all over the Mediterranean world back to Jerusalem for the Passover celebration. They were pilgrims there. They were converted there. They ended up staying because there was no other church anywhere in the world. They had to be taken care of by the people in Jerusalem. It was tough to be a Christian in Jerusalem. You might lose your job; you’d be persecuted from your family; you wouldn’t have any resources.

Being a Christian in Jerusalem after the Day of Pentecost was very difficult; we know by chapter 8. All of a sudden persecution comes, and people are killed, and the apostle James is killed, and Stephen is stoned. It’s tough being a Christian in Jerusalem because of the animosity of the Jewish elite. So they were always having the problem of, “How do we take care of these people who live somewhere else, but stayed because this is where they were converted, and they became a part of the church?”

Paul was, everywhere he went, collecting money to bring back to Jerusalem. So he says he’d been pleased to make from Macedonia and Achaia contribution for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. They were pleased to do so, and are indebted to them. They’re indebted to the saints in Jerusalem where God began this work, and they’re happy to send money.

Wherever Paul went, he says he made collections. He told the Corinthians, he said, “You’ve got to give, and you’ve got to give generously. Whatever you sow sparingly, you reap sparingly; whatever you sow generously, you reap generously.”

He says in 1 Corinthians 16, “Take offerings every week; don’t wait until I come. Take the offerings every week, accumulate the money, and when I come, I’ll be able to take it back to the saints.” That’s it, just love. That’s a great place to end.

I said earlier, “Does this mean that we abrogate the law: ‘There’s no law; now we’re free in Christ. No more law’?” No. No. The moral law of God – that is what is right – is still in place, not circumcision and ceremonial laws and rituals and traditions. But the moral law is still right.

And I know the world looks at Christians and they say, “You know, you people are just so tied up. You’re so restricted with all the rules.” Let me help you with that. Here’s how a Christian is defined.

A Christian is one who loves God, and who desires to love God with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength. He loves God, he loves the Lord Jesus Christ, he even loves the blessed Holy Spirit. The law, the moral law, is simply a reflection of the nature of God. If you love someone, you desire to

please them. Is that not true? If you love someone, you do everything you can to please them. You're not bound to do that, your heart wants to do that. That's what it is to be a Christian.

We are not the older brother. We're not mad because somebody broke the law. That is the ugliest person really that Jesus ever designed, the older brother who can't join the party. He's furious that his law-breaking brother was forgiven, and he's furious that his father forgave him. And he's a Pharisee; he's a Judaizer, he's a legalist. Look, we love God; we love His law. "If you love Me, keep My" – what? – "commandments. And they're not burdensome."

And we love each other. You don't have to force us to meet the needs of the poor; that's the very thing we are very eager to do. David says, "O how I love Your law. O how I love Your law. Your law reflect you, and all I want to do is honor You."

The first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength; and the second is to love your neighbor as yourself. So are we law-breakers now because we have become believers? No. We pay no attention to the circumcision, and ceremonial laws, and external laws, and rituals, and ancestral traditions. But the moral law is a reflection of God whom we love, and therefore we love everything about God, everything that's a reflection of His glory.

So what is Paul saying to us and to the Galatians? "I am a true apostle, I preach the true gospel, my own personal testimony validates it, and the apostles and leaders of the Jerusalem church validate it."

There's only one gospel. There might be different methods, might become all things to all men methodologically. But there's only one gospel. There's not a hodgepodge of gospels: the theology of Paul, the theology of the apostles, the theology of Peter, the theology of John. There's just one gospel, one theology, one God; and the truth of the gospel must be maintained, it must be defended, it must be proclaimed. Let's bow together in prayer.

Father, we thank You for again leading us through this passage with such clarity. It just jumps up and grabs our minds and hearts to see the wonder of this. We feel like we're alive with Paul. We feel like we're there in the struggle. And we are in a different time, different place.

Thank You for the glorious gospel. Thank You for bringing us not only to know of it, and not only to know it, but to know the Lord of the gospel, to know Jesus as our Lord and our Savior. Thank You for this gift of all gifts, which we do not deserve; but for which we worship and praise You, and will forever. Amen.

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