

The Truth of the Gospel (Pt. 2)

Galatians 2:1-14

Tampa Covenant Church

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Proposition: Because God shows no partiality, Jew and Gentile alike are saved through faith in Jesus Christ alone; therefore, we preserve the truth of the gospel by walking in step with it.

FCF: Not walking in the truth of the gospel through hypocritical living.

RHF: Through his person and work, Jesus Christ has secured the way of all kinds of people to God so that all who receive him by faith alone are welcomed into the one family of God.

(#1) Introduction:

We're continuing our fall series in Galatians, entitled *The Gospel of Freedom*. Paul has already established that his apostleship and his gospel didn't come to him through the agency of man but through a revelation of Christ. And he's clear with the Galatians; this is the gospel they received. And in our text this morning, Paul continues to argue for the truth of the gospel by telling stories. He pulls back the curtain and tells the Galatians about a private meeting between himself and the apostles in Jerusalem. Then he recalls a public confrontation between him and Peter in Antioch. So, we'll unpack these events and consider what they reveal about the gospel and its implications for our lives. And what we'll see is that because God shows no partiality, Jew and Gentile alike are saved through faith in Jesus Christ alone; therefore, we answer the call to preserve the truth of the gospel by (#2) walking in step with it.

The Truth of the Gospel Preserved: *Our redemptive heritage (vv.1-5)*

(#3) We open the text and Paul says he returned to Jerusalem after fourteen years. This time around, he's accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. And he discloses that he met privately with *"those who seemed influential to set before them the gospel he proclaims among the Gentiles, to make sure he wasn't running or had run in vain."* Now, Paul never appealed to the Jerusalem apostles to weigh in on the authenticity of his gospel; rather he was there by a revelation from God. But in this meeting, he's seeking clear agreement with the apostles on what constitutes the truth of the gospel. In so doing, he's working to avert a theological crisis that could lead to a major division within the early church.¹

Here in v.3, Paul basically cuts to the quick and tells us what (#4) happened to Titus; *"But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek."* Titus became a believer under Paul's ministry, and now here he is in the meeting, serving as a living example of a Gentile who had been accepted by God through faith in Christ alone. (#5 Blank) To understand why this is a big deal; we recall that God gave circumcision to Abraham as the sign of the covenant between God and his people. It marked membership in the covenant community. So much so that any uncircumcised male would be considered *"cut off from his people"* for breaking the covenant. By Paul's day, circumcision had become a significant marker of Jewish identity. As earlier generations suffered and died under oppressive regimes to hold on to this identity marker. So for many first-century Jews, circumcision pointed to God's covenant faithfulness and their unique identity as his people.² And this conviction established an underlying tension in the meeting. (#6) Paul tells us that false brothers had been secretly brought in to spy out their freedom in Christ (experienced in the gospel) in order to bring them into slavery (adherence to an

identity marker in order to be accepted by God). This was the issue posing a threat to the truth of the gospel that Paul preached to the Galatians.

(#7 Blank) We're all familiar with the stuff we buy that instructs us to "*just add water.*" You've got everything you need and the only thing missing is the water. That's basically what these false brothers were doing with the gospel. According to their theology, a Gentile's profession of faith in Christ wasn't enough; they still needed to add circumcision to the mix in order to get in. But the moment you say something must be added to Christ's finished work in order to be accepted by God; Christ is no longer sufficient. In our day and age, it may not be circumcision but our hearts are always looking to contribute something to ensure our acceptance before God. But the truth of the gospel leaves no room for "Christ plus" because Christ is truly sufficient. To add anything as an additional requirement for receiving God's grace would be to compromise our freedom in Christ and bring ourselves into bondage.³ And in the face of such (#8) opposition, Paul says, "*to them we did not yield for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.*"

(#9 Blank) And this local congregation in Tampa, FL should be very thankful that Paul didn't yield for a moment. Because through the providential hand of God, the truth of the gospel was also being preserved for us. We read from Ps. 67 where the (#10) Psalmist sang out, "*May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations.*" May we hear and recite these words not just as an ancient prayer of Israel's but as a part of our own redemptive heritage as those belonging to the nations. Because through the grace of God in Christ; his saving power has come to fruition in our lives. The gospel Paul refused to surrender for the Galatian church is the same gospel by which we have been brought near. (#11) And it's not a gospel of bondage but a gospel of freedom. And this is the very gospel despite the opposition of the false brothers that the Jerusalem apostles affirmed.

The Truth of the Gospel Affirmed: *Recognition of the grace of God at work (vv.6-10)*

Paul now returns to his (#12) train of thought from v.2, "*And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.*" Four times in today's text, Paul refers to the apostles as "*those who seemed....*" He does it in v.2, twice here in v.6 and in v.9, we see he's referring to Peter, James (Lord's brother) and John and this time around he says they "*seemed to be pillars.*" Paul isn't being disrespectful; he's simply acknowledging their authority to those who held them in high esteem and at the same time establishing his authority independent of theirs.⁴ (#13 Blank) True, Paul never walked and talked with Jesus during his earthly ministry but the risen Christ who appeared to him on the road to Damascus was the same Jesus who walked the dusty roads of Galilee and died on a cross outside the gates of Jerusalem.⁵ Thus, his calling was in no way inferior to theirs. The Judaizers may have thought so (#14) but Paul is clear; in terms of his calling; God shows no partiality. Literally meaning, God does not receive the face of someone.⁶ To do that is to look at person's external appearance and make evaluations on that basis.⁷

The false brothers were certainly doing this to Paul as they judged Paul by their external standards but that wasn't the case with the Jerusalem apostles. Unlike the false brothers who wanted to add circumcision as a condition for right standing with (#15) God; the Jerusalem apostles added nothing to

Paul's gospel. Amid all that tension in the room they saw that Paul had been entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised as Peter to the circumcised; not two different gospels but one gospel going out in fulfillment of the Great Commission Jesus had given to the apostles."⁸ (#16) And Paul says, they perceived the grace that was given him; which resulted in a handshake and a mutual agreement to minister to the poor.

How attentive are we in perceiving the grace of God at work in each other? It's a question worth asking because partiality focuses on outward appearances and status, while Christian discernment seeks to recognize the evidence of God's grace at work in each other. And this isn't a question for the leaders of this church but for all of us because we all comprise the body of Christ. In writing to the church at (#17) Corinth, Paul said, *"Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone."* That's exactly what we're seeing here. (#18 Blank) The same God who was at work through Peter among the Jews was at work through Paul among the Gentiles. Differing mission fields but the same God graciously at work in both of their lives for his glory. When we fail to see God's grace at work in each other, we begin to compare, which can easily give way to criticism and competition all serving to distract us from the work of ministry God calls us to do together.

But when we recognize we're here not to compete, compare or criticize, we're free to extend the right hand of fellowship to each other and enter into meaningful gospel labor together. Because your giftedness isn't a threat to mine. Because God has lavished his same grace on us to serve as joyful witnesses of his kingdom. And that doesn't just affirm the truth of the gospel within the community; it displays the truth of the gospel outside the community. The world sees a church living in a manner consistent with the gospel it confesses; a community marked by humility, mutual recognition, fellowship, and shared witness. All of these things flow from walking in step with the truth of the gospel by the grace of God. And now we'll see what happens when the truth of the gospel affirmed at Jerusalem was compromised in Antioch. (#19) That's what Paul addresses in the final movement of our text.

The Truth of the Gospel Defended: *Against the danger of hypocritical living (vv.11-14)*

Listen again to the incident Paul (#20) describes between him and Peter: *"¹¹ But when Cephas came to Antioch,⁹ I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. ¹² For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. ¹³ And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy.* Paul is disclosing this incident with good reason.

(#21 Blank) The Lord had already dealt with Peter's sin of partiality in Acts 10. So he understood that Gentiles who placed their faith in Christ were fully accepted by God and welcomed among his people. So why would he withdraw from fellowshiping with Gentile believers in Antioch? Peter's theology didn't change, but because of his fear of criticism from the Judaizers, he acted contrary to his own convictions and that's called hypocrisy. And his hypocrisy infected the other Jewish Christians; most notably Barnabas. In yielding to the pressure, Peter basically walked back everything he affirmed in that private meeting. What he wholeheartedly supported in private, he contradicted by his conduct in public. And

church, that ought to get our attention because it reminds us that it's possible to believe the truth of the gospel and yet live in ways that contradict the gospel.

That's why Paul confronted and rebuked him (#22), *"But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, 'If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?'"* I don't know about any of you but I was raised with the understanding that, *"if you show out in public you will get dealt with in public."* Peter's withdrawal from the Gentile believers wasn't a private issue; it was a public scandal and needed to be dealt with publicly. See, Peter wasn't exercising liberty on a secondary issue of the faith; he was compromising the truth of the gospel. From his actions, the Gentile believers would naturally conclude that they were unacceptable and would need to become Jews by observing Jewish law in order to be accepted before God.¹⁰

(#23) John Stott writes of this, *"If Paul had not taken his stand against Peter that day, either the whole Christian church would have drifted into a Jewish backwater and stagnated, or there would have been a permanent rift between Gentile and Jewish Christendom, 'one Lord, but two Lord's tables'."*¹¹ As painful as this confrontation was, it was a necessary moment in the life of the early church because they were learning what it meant to live together as one people under the truth of the gospel.¹² Specifically, that those who stand guilty before God are accepted entirely by grace, on the basis of the work of Christ alone, received through the instrument of faith alone; not by anything contributed or achieved.

(#24 Blank) That's our call! To preserve the truth of the gospel. It's understanding our redemptive heritage that God's promise of salvation to the nations has been realized in our lives through the person and work of Christ. We preserve the truth of the gospel in this covenant community by recognizing the grace of God at work in each other's lives. And we preserve it by walking in step with it. In Paul, we see that dogged courage in contending for the truth of the gospel; and in Peter, we see how timidity can cause us to shrink back from the truth and succumb to partiality in a given situation.

So naturally, we all want to be more like Paul and less like Peter but honestly we should see something of ourselves in both men. Because there are times when we stand courageously for what is just, right and true and there are times when fear of criticism causes us to shrink back from the truth of the gospel. And as we saw in Peter's case, we must be on guard against how easily we can succumb to the sin of partiality. In allowing political affiliation to determine who we embrace as fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. Or allowing socioeconomic status to regulate how we treat a fellow believer or allowing ethnicity to dictate who we're most comfortable sharing life with. When we succumb to that kind of thinking we must ask ourselves the question, *"Am I walking in step with the truth of the gospel in this area of my life?"*

Conclusion:

And the answer is never resolving to try harder but taking into our hearts the truth that *"God shows no partiality."* Meaning, he didn't take our politics, social standing, ethnicity, or accomplishments into account in calling us to himself. So none of those things should become the criteria by which we receive one another. God received us by sheer grace through the person and work of Jesus Christ; the very substance of the truth of the gospel Paul is defending in this letter. None of us were accepted by God on

the basis of individual merit. He accepted us solely on the merit of Christ. Who rendered the perfect obedience we owed to God and bore the wrath of judgment due our rebellion. So we don't have to fixate on Paul's courage or Peter's failure in seeking to be more like Paul and less like Peter. Rather we look again and again to Christ; the one in whom our identity is found. The one who is infinitely worthy, yet humbled himself for us the unworthy, so that we might be called sons and daughters and welcomed into the household of God; fellowshiping with him and with one another as those who are wholly and dearly loved.

¹ Timothy George, *Galatians*, vol. 30, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 139.

² Ibid, 143.

³ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 43.

⁴ Douglas J. Moo, *Galatians*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 124.

⁵ George, 155–156.

⁶ προσωποληψία (*prosōpolēmpsia*) Partiality, favoritism (Ro 2:11; Eph 6:9; Col 3:25; Jas 2:1+)

⁷ Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, "Respect of Persons," *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 1838. See Rom 2:11, Eph 6:9; Col 3:25.

⁸ George, 162.

⁹ Antioch was first evangelized by some of those Christians who were scattered abroad as a result of the persecution occasioned by Stephen's death. Almost from the beginning the church at Antioch seems to have been a mixed congregation of completed and converted Gentiles (Acts 11:19–21). Its location was strategic for the commissioning of missionaries to carry the gospel to locations around the Mediterranean and beyond. Eric P. Costanzo, "Antioch of Syria," in *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*, ed. John D. Barry et al. (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

¹⁰ G. Walter Hansen, *Galatians*, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), Ga 2:14.

¹¹ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Galatians: Only One Way*, The Bible Speaks Today (Leicester, England; Downer's Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986), 52–53.

¹² George, 171.