

GALATIANS

2:1-21

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Taught by Simeon Forder on Sunday morning, 29th September 2024 @ Deal Christian Fellowship

Reading: Acts 11:19-26

Introduction

Last week we began a fresh study of the Bible book of Galatians; a 3000 word, 6 chapter letter written by the Apostle Paul to a group of churches in the Roman province of Galatia — which is in modern day Türkiye. The people there at that time were described even by Julius Caesar as fickle and fond of change — something that Paul had experienced *first hand* when travelling and preaching through that region, as recorded in Acts chapter 14. And now, Paul is hearing that they are turning again, not away from him, but from Christ. And so he writes this letter to address this grave concern.

The heart of the issue is that there were those that had come into the church, masquerading as those that told the truth, but were in fact teaching lies. For instead of preaching that salvation is by faith alone in Christ alone, they were telling these Christians that they must keep the law of God in order to be saved (which would consequently mean that salvation wasn't by grace or faith, after all).

Therefore, Paul wrote this letter to make it clear that grace and justification *were* by *faith* alone — robustly defending the truth, even sternly at times. And how thankful we should be that he did — not only for the Galatian's sake, but ours. For here so much of what we believe is underlined, is made unambiguously clear for us. And that's a good thing. It's an essential thing.

But in case you still wonder what reason we have to study this book and this topic today, let me give more than a billion reasons why we need to understand this. And I'm not exaggerating. For there are reckoned to be over 1.3 billion Catholics in the world today, who are part of a religious system that teaches works are necessary for salvation. That is, they are part of a religious system that has twisted the gospel into something that cannot save.

Dave Hunt, who wrote extensively on this, among other topics, put it so well, writing:

Here is a huge mission field of those whose Church has deceived them with a false gospel that cannot take them to heaven. We need to love Catholics enough to tell them the good news that they can receive forgiveness of all sin (past, present and future) and eternal life through faith in Christ's finished work on the cross... Let us be in continual prayer and evangelism effort to win Catholics to Christ.

Dave Hunt

If what was happening in the churches in Galatia was enough to prompt one of Paul's most direct and stern letters, imagine how would have likewise responded to what we see in the Catholic church today. We cannot ignore what this letter says. It would be dangerous for us to do so.

Chapter overview of Galatians

- **Chapters 1-2:** Personal
- **Chapters 3-4:** Doctrinal
- **Chapters 5-6:** Practical

Now, as we saw last week, there's an easy way to memorise how the 6 chapters of this letter are laid out, for the first two chapters largely detail Paul's personal experience with grace. Chapters 3 & 4 are Paul's doctrinal teaching on the law vs grace. And chapters 5 & 6 give us practical application, giving instruction on what our response to God's grace should look like.

Overview of chapter two

Overview of chapter two

- **v1-10** — Paul goes to Jerusalem (again), and grace is confirmed
- **v11-21** — Peter goes to Antioch, and grace is defended

This morning, we're going to study all of chapter two. And we can really split it into two halves. The first, from verses 1-10, detail Paul's third post-conversion visit to Jerusalem, where he meets Peter, James and John. While there he shares the good news he has been preaching (which was indeed the purpose of his visit), to find that it was identical to that which *they* had been preaching. Which is unsurprising when we know that the source of both was Jesus Himself.

In the second half of this chapter, from verses 11-21, Peter goes to Antioch, where Paul has been ministering, and this time there is a matter that Peter needs correcting on — and we're going to see wisdom and maturity in how that takes place. And what we read here, will, unsurprisingly, set us up to study chapter 3 next week, which will talk further about the law vs faith.

Chapter two

So then, picking up our study in the first two verses of chapter 2, we read Paul continue with edited highlights of his testimony:

Galatians 2:1-2

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

So, fourteen years after his first post-conversion trip to Jerusalem, where he went to see Peter (as noted in chapter 1), he went to Jerusalem again to talk with the other apostles there on this very topic of the law and grace. Why? Because the Galatian churches Paul was *now* writing to were not the *first* ones to find people coming into the church teaching contrary to the Bible. In fact, we find that the church in Antioch, the third-largest city in the Roman Empire (and where the disciples were first called Christians), had also faced this same problem. Not only false teachers, but this specific problem of them teaching that works were required to be saved.

In our reading from Acts 11 this morning we heard how when Paul had first started persecuting the church, the believers scattered throughout the region, with some ending up as far away as Phoenicia, Cyprus, and this city called Antioch, which city is *also* in modern day Türkiye, just north of the Syrian border, and now known as Antakya. We also heard how the disciples sent a godly man called Barnabas there, and he was happy to find that indeed the *grace* of God was at work, and a great many people were being saved.

But roll on to chapter 15 of Acts, some time after Barnabas had brought Saul from Tarsus to Antioch, and after they had completed their first missionary journey together, we read:

Acts 15:1-11

And certain men came down from Judea and taught the brethren, "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved." Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question.

So, being sent on their way by the church, they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria, describing the conversion of the Gentiles; and they caused great joy to all the brethren. And when they had come to Jerusalem, they were received by the church and the apostles and the elders; and they reported all things that God had done with them. But some of the sect of the Pharisees who believed rose up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."

Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter. And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them: "Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. Now therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they."

Then, after listening to Paul and Barnabas, we read in verse 22 onwards...

Acts 15:22-31

Then it pleased the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas, namely, Judas who was also named Barsabas, and Silas, leading men among the brethren.

They wrote this letter by them: The apostles, the elders, and the brethren, To the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia: Greetings.

Since we have heard that some who went out from us have troubled you with words, unsettling your souls, saying, "You must be circumcised and keep the law"—to whom we gave no such commandment — it seemed good to us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men to you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. We have therefore sent Judas and Silas, who will also report the same things by word of mouth. For it seemed good to the Holy Spirit, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things: that you abstain from things offered to idols, from blood, from things strangled, and from sexual immorality. If you keep yourselves from these, you will do well. Farewell.

So when they were sent off, they came to Antioch; and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the letter. When they had read it, they rejoiced over its encouragement.

So, the church there in Antioch, whose souls had been unsettled in exactly the same way as Paul in chapter 1 had described the Galatian churches had been troubled, were given absolute clarity that works were *not* required in order to be saved. Yet, in response to salvation, there were certain things that believers should keep themselves from.

And it is to this council, this discussion among the apostles and elders that we've just read about in Acts 15, that Paul now refers to as he writes this letter to the Galatian churches. Noting first that he spoke to them privately, for he was not looking to cause a scene, but simply seek confirmation that from the apostles that they were all preaching the same thing. And he specifically notes that he took Titus with him. Why?

We read:

Galatians 2:3

Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

You see, if Titus — an uncircumcised Greek man — could be a Christian, then either circumcision wasn't necessary for his salvation, or Titus was, in fact, not saved at all. That put this whole question in very real terms as they looked at this young believer. And we read in verse 4:

Galatians 2:4

And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),

That is, there were those who were highly suspicious of anyone who called themselves a Christian, but were not a Jew, and as such had not followed the law. The same people who thought "how can God save the *Gentiles*?!". And so, by sneakily visiting the bathing houses they would clearly see if a man had been circumcised or not, so they could tut tut and point the finger at that person for not having kept the law — mistakenly thinking that liberty, freedom from the law, meant being liberal, and thus exhibiting lawlessness. But Paul says we knew what they were up to, noting:

Galatians 2:5

to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

In other words, Paul says to the Galatians "we didn't give them time of day. For what good would it have done if we had capitulated to their opinion based requirements when there were no Biblical based requirements to act as they wanted us to? That would have sent a mixed message to the Christians in Antioch, and to you, if we had *said* that salvation was by faith alone, to then *act* as if it were by works."

I can imagine the conversation, as these legalistic men piped up saying "do you realise that Titus isn't circumcised?!" To which Paul replies "Yes. And?! Salvation isn't by keeping the law, which even *you* can't do, but rather, salvation is by grace." But Paul's visit to Jerusalem wasn't to speak with those who were trying to *change* the gospel, but to speak with those who had also heard it straight from Christ. So he writes:

Galatians 2:6

But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favouritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.

And so Paul notes how those who had walked with Christ, and had also heard the gospel straight from Him, added *no* requirements for salvation, *no* additional message that Paul must preach, beyond the *completed* work of Christ, who died in our place, giving Himself for our sins.

In other words, Paul writes "Peter, James, John, and the others didn't tell me anything I didn't already know". Underlining that he had been preaching a complete gospel, that there was nothing, absolutely nothing that needed to be added to grace.

And so rather than rebuke Paul for dodgy theology, we read:

Galatians 2:7

But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter

That is, when they saw Paul was preaching the *same* gospel but to a *different* audience (and Paul notes...):

Galatians 2:8

(for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles),

Again, that is, God was working through all of them, had called each of them to be apostles, and had entrusted them to share not their own, but *His* gospel:

Galatians 2:9

and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

So then, these three godly men (who were indeed such prominent individuals in the early church), rather than rebuke Paul and Barnabas for sharing a *different* gospel, instead recognised they were sharing the *same* gospel, and as such gave them the right hand of fellowship — a phrase used to describe complete acceptance of them and their ministry, that the Gentiles (the non-Jews) may also be reached with the wonderful news of what Christ had done, that they might be saved.

Verse 10:

Galatians 2:10

They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

And this had already been evidenced in Paul's life, as he and Barnabas had taken an offering from the Christians in Antioch to the believers in Judea back in Acts chapter 11, demonstrating his eagerness. But let's take a moment here, for this is a really important verse. We must understand it, and not take it out of context, for it is placed in the middle of talking about grace in chapter 1 and Paul *further* saying grace is sufficient for salvation in chapter 2. So, we can't take this and make it our motto as a church. We are of course to care for those in need. Indeed, James would go on to write in his letter that we should show our faith *by* our works. But we can't make our works more important than the gospel itself. And we certainly can't make our works a requirement for our salvation. That's precisely what this council in Jerusalem had met to discuss.

You see, the primary business of the church, and the primary business of the individual Christian is to lead people to Christ. Of course, we should also show great love, great care, great compassion. God's Word *should* produce the kind of people who want to do jobs that *serve* others, that *help* others, that look after the vulnerable. It should produce they type of people who volunteer at food banks, soup kitchens, and homeless shelters. It should produce the kind of people who give their time, energy, and money to good causes. But those things are not *instead* of the gospel, or to earn our salvation, but in response to it. They are not to be to the detriment of sharing the gospel, but to open up even more opportunity for it to be shared.

Now, as Paul writes to the Galatians here, he has underlined how the church in Antioch was given *unambiguous* reassurance that *no* rule keeping, *no* application of the law, was required for them to be saved. That was the clear message given to the believers in Antioch when false teachers had tried to say otherwise, and Paul is repeating these details to *remind* the Galatian churches that it applies to *them* too. But he's not done yet, for next he'll draw on his own testimony, his own experience, to show what must be done when such false teaching arises.

And he jumps forward in time to when Peter came to Antioch, some time after the events of Acts 15 that we've just been looking at. We read:

Galatians 2:11

Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed;

This is a big deal. Paul had just written that Peter, along with James and John, seemed like *pillars* in the early church. And Peter was also the first apostle he had first gone to see after his conversion, knowing that Peter understood the grace of God. Yet here he is, correcting him (which, as aside shoots a hole in the Roman Catholic belief that Peter was the first Pope, and that Popes are infallible). Clearly, Peter was able to make mistakes, as we are.

Now, did Paul correct him aggressively? No, the Greek word here means to *oppose* — not to stir up hatred, or even an argument. Did Paul do it tentatively? No, he was certain in what and why he was opposing him. Did he do it lovingly? Yes, I'm certain of that, for we see no schism, no difficulty arose between them. There is evidently wisdom on Paul's part in how he handled it, and faithfulness in actually doing it.

But consider Peter too, for he could have reacted by saying "who do you think you are, Paul?! You literally murdered Christians, people I knew were scared you might kill them, and you consented to innocent men's deaths. How dare you tell me what to do!". But again, we see no division between them *whatsoever*. And so there is much maturity on Peter's part too.

And we should all learn from this. For not one of us is beyond correction. Not one of us should be so proud that we are unwilling to let someone correct us. We can't be overly sensitive to people correcting us on *any* matter. Rather, we should patiently listen to what they say, evaluate whether it is true, and then act on it accordingly. We can't fly off the handle.

But, in similar manner we should also note that when we correct others, we should also do so appropriately, fairly, and lovingly. We should aim for clarity, and speak with kindness. For our goal is not to destroy, humiliate or mock the other person. But simply to correct them.

Sadly, our culture doesn't encourage maturity in this area. Take YouTube for example; it can be a useful tool — for work, for hobbies, and indeed there are some good Bible focussed videos there too. But far too many videos have click-bait titles such as "Watch person A *DESTROY* person B over topic X!!" — now the content might still be OK, indeed there are some thoughtful debates and mature reasoning that are found behind such immature titles. But we must not let this permeate our thinking so that we approach any matter of correction thinking "I'm going to destroy that person with my argument". That's not loving, it's not Biblical, it's not Christ-like. We must not do it.

Rather, correction is to be clearly and kindly delivered, for the other's benefit, and the benefit of all. Not the destruction of your opponent. That's childish. And, let me add one wise comment I read recently, which is that if your hill isn't Scripture, it's not worth dying on.

Now, there's more to consider from this verse. We have looked at *who* was being corrected, and *by* whom. But note *where* this was taking place too. For it was in Antioch. And that is important context, for first, this church had previously had false teachers come in teaching that the keeping of the law was required for salvation — which is what had prompted the church sending Barnabas and Paul to Jerusalem in the first place, as Paul had recorded in the first 10 verses of this chapter. And as we'll see, Peter's actions not only now caused confusion on this same topic, but caused *others* to compromise too — which is why it needed to be addressed. Furthermore, Paul was one of the spiritual leaders in this church in Antioch, he had taught many there, and had responsibility to care for the spiritual needs of that local church.

And it should be stressed that a pastor must shepherd the flock. That means feeding them. But it also means protecting them. So let's be clear; we don't shut the door in people's faces, and anyone is welcome to come hear and listen to the Word of God. They don't have to agree with all or any of what we say. But if they start preaching another gospel, or trying to cause disunity or division, if they pose harm to anyone here, they must be corrected, and, if needed, removed. That's the responsibility a pastor has as a shepherd. It's the responsibility elders also have as they care for the spiritual needs of the church.

So, back to this passage in Galatians, what was it that Paul needed to correct Peter on? Well, we read:

Galatians 2:12

for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision.

That is, Peter had arrived in Antioch and had enjoyed fellowship with the Gentile, non-Jewish, believers in the church, eating dinner with them, which was a huge sign of acceptance in that culture. It was as good as saying those you ate with were your family. But when other Jewish believers had come down from James in Jerusalem, he distanced himself from his Gentile friends, fearful that he would be criticised by those who had grown up under the law.

And this was hypocritical, not only because he changed his behaviour so quickly, but because he had already received his vision from God back in Acts chapter 10 that God would save the Gentiles too, with God saying to him *"What God has cleansed you must not call common."* And Peter had subsequently gone on to teach that there was no difference between Jews and Gentiles when it comes to the gospel, then reinforcing this in the very words he spoke in front of Paul and Barnabas in Acts 15. So, this was a problem with his personal conduct, that didn't match what he had taught. But, as I'm certain we give too little thought to in our *own* lives, his personal conduct affected others, causing others to be hypocritical too. We read in verse 13:

Galatians 2:13

And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

And so Peter, out of fear of what others might think, acted contrary to the Bible, and others followed his example. Let us be warned what effect our personal conduct may have too! There are children, teenagers, young adults, and likely younger Christians than you here, that are watching how you live, day by day, and week by week. There is a responsibility on you and me to live right, for their sakes, as well as ours, as well as for God's glory.

Here, Peter had made a public error that had caused others to error too. And so Paul, for the good of all, corrected him in front of them all. We read:

Galatians 2:14

But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

Note that Paul said, not shouted these words. He spoke openly and directly to him, not whispered about him behind his back. And he said to Peter *you can't tell people to do something you don't do yourself*. In other words, "If you can't keep the law as a Jew, how do you expect the Gentiles to keep it?". And he continues:

Galatians 2:15-16

We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Here, Paul was saying; "even we — Jews steeped in the law, who've grown up with it — know that the law can't save us. Rather we need faith in Christ to save us." And indeed, the Jews had already proven that it was impossible to keep the law, and so expecting the Gentiles to keep it was a pointless exercise. And since the gentile believers were already justified by grace, it would be madness for them to turn from God's grace to earning their salvation by the keeping of the law, even *if* that were possible.

The challenge for the ardent Jewish believer, even the legalist today, however, was even if they could accept that man could *only* be saved by grace, that he could never *earn* his way into heaven, that would *appear* to them that God's grace was actually giving *permission* for sin. That it wouldn't *matter* how someone lived, if indeed their salvation was dependent on Christ, and not them.

So Paul tackles this head on, still speaking to Peter, and writing in verse 17:

Galatians 2:17-18

But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

What Paul is saying is that God's grace doesn't *make* us sinners, rather it is there because we *are* sinners. But, if, having *accepted* God's grace to pay for all our sin, we then put into place rules and regulations that we must keep in order to be saved, we're going to find ourselves sinning once again, breaking those rules and regulations because we cannot keep the law. And we'll essentially be saying that Christ's sacrifice wasn't sufficient to pay for those things we have now condemned ourselves in.

But, Paul writes, the reality we find ourselves in, is different:

Galatians 2:19

For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

That is, because the penalty of the law has been laid on Christ in our place, it no longer has any claim on me. Just as no corpse has ever been put on trial. But this is not so we can live how we please, but that we might live to please God.

Indeed, Paul now goes on to say that our old life is gone. We read:

Galatians 2:20

I have been crucified with Christ; 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 for me.

I once lived believing that my good deeds would be good enough, but I was wrong, for such was my sin that it required Jesus to die on the cross in my place, to pay for all my sin. And Jesus death has also signified death in my life — for that old sinful life, which he paid for, is now done away with. And instead I now walk in newness of life, not trying to earn my salvation, but through faith in response to Christ's gift of salvation to me.

By doing this, Paul says...

Galatians 2:21

I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

In other words, if I thought I could earn my way into heaven, I would basically be saying that Christ's death on the cross was a waste of time, because I'm good enough on my own. But as we know, our good deeds do not outweigh our bad deeds. A single lie requires an entire Saviour, so pure is God's holy standard. And there is no way the law could ever save us, so God be praised that Jesus paid for our sin, the innocent for the guilty.

That brings an end to this chapter, but also Paul's correction of Peter. In summary he had said to him — *if you're not keeping to the law, why are you saying by your actions that the Gentile believers should keep it for their salvation? Especially when we know that no man can be justified by it?!*

Peter knew this was an error, for he had heard the truth from God Himself, he had taught as much to many people. So this was an error on his part, being more fearful of man's opinion than God's. But Paul soundly corrected him, not slandering the man, but clearly stating what was wrong with his actions, and what they implied. And once again let me say, there was no recorded division between them. None whatsoever.

Conclusion

This is a fundamentally important chapter in the Bible, as indeed much of Galatians is — for it really is a matter of life and death on an eternal scale, for our sin must be paid for. And as Paul has, and will continue to demonstrate through this letter, we cannot earn our way into heaven. The only way we will ever get there is by accepting what Christ has done for us, paying for all our sin. And anyone who teaches otherwise should be corrected, and if unwilling to listen, should be removed from the local church, for it is that dangerous.



Application questions

As is a healthy habit for us, let us consider a few questions, as we look to apply this to our lives.

- Are we more fearful of man, than we are of God?
- Where correction is required, are we willing to give it, or receive it?

- Are we kind in our delivery of correction? Are we humble in receiving it?
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