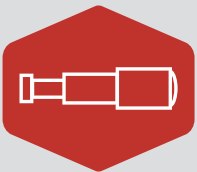




Lesson 4: Grace and Freedom

Main Idea: Paul proved that he received his gospel message straight from the Lord, not from other people. In this lesson you will discover that Paul stresses the origins of the gospel because people were adding to the gospel message—making it no gospel at all. Paul's passion to share the gospel was intense, and we, too, should have an intense desire to share the gospel of God's grace and freedom with others.

Scripture: Galatians 2:1-10



The Author's Lens (Spyglass)

What did the Scripture mean to the original author and audience? As you explore information on the author, content, culture, history, land, and language of the Bible, you will gain a better understanding of the intended message of God's Word.

Paul wrote this letter because the churches in Galatia faced a potential split. Paul understood this importance of this moment and knew that there was a doctrinal problem—a problem of beliefs that changed the way people lived. As we learned in previous lessons, Judaizers had come into the Galatian churches and taught that if people wanted to be true Christians, they had to abide by the law of Moses.

Paul refuted this by teaching that Christianity is faith in Jesus Christ plus nothing else: a person is fully accepted into God's family by faith in Christ alone. The Judaizers tried to invalidate this message by attempting to convince the Galatian believers that Paul was nothing more than a second-rate apostle. They argued that he listened to the apostles in Jerusalem and was trying to copy them. Paul responded by pointing out that he was independent

from the apostles and had instead received his revelation straight from Jesus himself (see Galatians 1:11-12).

In these first ten verses of chapter two, Paul explains that while he was independent from the apostles, not hearing the gospel from them first, he was also in unity with them in terms of the gospel message. He and the apostles were unified in their belief that a Gentile believer did not have to live out the law of Moses to be a follower of Jesus.

Already we see that Paul’s relationship to the Law is different from the Judaizers’ relationship to the law of Moses—also called the Law. Pausing our movement through Galatians 2 now to give background on the Law is helpful for understanding the rest of the book. After God delivered the Israelites from Egyptian slavery, they still thought and acted as if they were. So, God gave them laws that set them apart as His people in how they worshipped, ate, dressed, conducted business, and more—the Law was for all aspects of life.

God’s laws gave the Israelites a higher standard than other nations of the day, yet God knew that no one could perfectly keep all His laws. He made a way for them to be forgiven when they inevitably broke the Law: an animal would be sacrificed, and its blood symbolically covered the sin for a period of time. Though these laws might look severe to us today, they were actually more humane than the law codes of other ancient Near Eastern people groups, and these laws preserved the Israelites as a race. The preservation of this people group was critical to fulfill the promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 12:1-3, that all nations of the world would be blessed through Abraham’s line. The Old Testament details numerous times God’s enemies tried to destroy Israel, yet God always preserved a remnant of His people who walked in holiness, keeping these laws with head and heart. The New Testament opens with four books about Jesus, one of Abraham’s descendants, whose death and resurrection made salvation possible. This is the salvation that Paul, also a Jew, preached.

Jesus tells His hearers in Matthew’s Gospel that He did not come to destroy the Law but to fulfill it (Matthew 5:17). But what does this mean for the Old Testament laws we read in our Bibles—especially for those of us who are not Jewish? The moral laws of the Old Testament (the Ten Commandments) are repeated in the New Testament.¹

In contrast, the Judaizers wanted Gentile believers to keep, at a minimum, the command of circumcision, which meant a full, legal conversion to Judaism.²

1 Of the Ten Commandments given in the Old Testament, nine of them are directly repeated. The only one not directly repeated is the Sabbath command, although believers after the resurrection are instructed to live by the principle of the Sabbath.

2 D. Thomas Lancaster, *The Holy Epistle to the Galatians* (Marshfield, MO: First Fruits of Zion, 2011), 66.

Again, Paul stood and wrote strongly: when a Gentile believer accepted Christ, it was not Christ plus Judaism. Faith in Jesus alone was sufficient. And so it is for us today. This is grace.

But grace to Paul did not (and does not) mean rejecting all of the law of Moses. For example, there was nothing wrong with being a circumcised male as long as the one circumcised was not touting it as being necessary for salvation. This has everything to do with Titus, Paul's next focus in his argument for why salvation is Christ plus nothing else.

Titus was a Gentile believer who had come to faith in Christ through Paul's preaching and who then became one of Paul's coworkers. In addition to traveling with Paul, he ministered in Corinth on Paul's behalf, delivering a difficult letter and collecting money for the suffering church in Macedonia (2 Corinthians 7:6-16; 8:16-24). Paul later sent him to Crete to plant churches, and Paul's letter to Titus about pastoral issues in Crete is the Bible book that bears his name. But what made this all possible was the Jerusalem apostles' decision recorded in Galatians 2:3.

Being a Gentile, Titus was not circumcised—what the Judaizers said must be done to become Christian. The Jerusalem apostles knew this, did not require his circumcision, and still considered Titus a full-fledged Christian. A decision like this coming from the Jerusalem apostles was ground-breaking: it “officially” showed that Jesus, and not an outward symbol of Judaism, was the identifier for Christianity. The Judaizers and the Galatians would know it wasn't just Paul who said this: it was the pillars of the faith themselves: James, Peter (also called Cephas), and John.

This section of Galatians shows that Paul held the Jerusalem apostles in very high regard. Paul chose to act as a man under authority, knowing the apostles could discredit his message. However, although Paul sought their validation, he knew he ultimately answered to and was validated by God. Keener writes, “Paul is saying that he needed the pillars' approval for the sake of his gospel's credibility . . . but as far as God was concerned Paul's gospel remains true regardless of anyone's approval.”³

Moving on from verse 3, in verse 4 Paul calls the Judaizers false brothers who showed up “to spy out,” a military phrase he uses here metaphorically. The stakes were high with implications for the entire Church, not just the Galatians. If Peter, James, and John had decided to side with the Judaizers, one of two things would have happened. Either the Church would have become a small sect within Judaism, or a divided Church would have been the result.

³ Craig S. Keener, *Galatians: A Commentary*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2019), 112.

Verses 5 through 10 sum up the rest of Paul’s interactions with the Jerusalem apostles James, Peter (Cephas), and John. His respect for their authority is high, but it is clear that it is Jesus to whom Paul bows, and not to earthly figures. In verse 9, Paul uses the interesting phrase “the right hand of fellowship.” This was far more than two people shaking hands; it signified an official agreement. The three pillar apostles—James, Peter (Cephas), and John—agreed with Paul that nothing need be added to the gospel message, and they accepted Paul as one of them.⁴ It both established Paul’s apostolic authority and the fact that the message of the gospel is Jesus plus nothing.

In verse 10, the apostles in Jerusalem ask Paul to remember the poor. Paul is reminding the reader that he came to Jerusalem also to help the church there, which had experienced severe financial issues. Because of this, the body of believers there was the poorest church in that time. God’s Word prioritizes helping the poor, disenfranchised, and marginalized. And in the Jewish context, the verb for *remember* is not only to be mindful of obligations but also to act upon them.⁵ What they were asking of Paul was for him to remain connected to the Jerusalem church, even as he continued to minister among the Gentiles—something Paul was very eager to do.

⁴ This private meeting was a historical moment prior to the public meeting described in Acts 15.

⁵ Lancaster, 45.

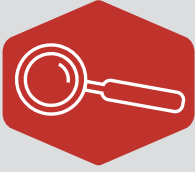


My Lens (Eyeglasses)

What does this Scripture say to you? Through studying the biblical explanations and principles in the text and bullet points below, you will better understand what God's Word is saying to you today.

Read these statements and write below or in your journal what these truths say to you:

- The gospel is about grace.
- The gospel message brings freedom.
- Paul's gospel message was confirmed and embraced by the entire Church (Galatians 2:4-10).
- God's Spirit of unity works through authority structures (v. 2).
- Unity accepts all who are in Christ (v. 6).
- Biblical unity maintains unity without uniformity (vv. 7-8).
- Biblical unity requires boundaries that exclude (v. 9).
- You have a calling—and it's likely different from the callings around you.
- Give God room to work.
- Let God work through people the way He wants.
- Let God use your story.



The Holy Spirit Lens (Magnifying Glass)

How can the Scripture apply to your life? By listening to the Holy Spirit's leading as you answer this series of questions, you can gain useful insights that will help you apply the truth of God's Word to your daily life.

Write down your answer to the following questions here or in your journal:

- Circle and write down any recurring words in this passage.

- Who appears in this passage?

- Where is this passage taking place?

- When is this passage occurring?

- Why is this passage important?

- What is happening in this passage?

- How does this passage apply to my life?

Write down your answers to the following questions about unity here or in your journal.

- What is required for a person to be made new in Christ?
 - » Are there things you have to correct before God will save you?

 - » Are there behaviors you have to embrace? Are there practices you need to learn or experiences you need to have to be saved?

- Why is unity in the Church important?

- What are some ways we can demonstrate our acceptance of others?

- What are some ways we can express to other believers that we value them?

- What are some ways we can build each other up in Christ?

- How can we maintain unity despite our differences?



Using My *Fire Bible*®

Read the *Fire Bible* study notes for the following verses and articles and answer the accompanying questions.

- **Galatians 2:4** According to the *Fire Bible* note, what is legalism? Describe your understanding.

- **Galatians 2:5** What happens if we neglect or abandon any part of the Gospel that Paul preached?

- **Galatians 2:6** What does God see and evaluate?

- **Galatians 2:10** What are two things the poor need from a believer?

- Look in your *Fire Bible* article index for “The Heart.” Read it and then answer the following:
 - » What is the definition of *heart*?

 - » What are some emotions and attitudes the Bible says we feel in the heart?

