

Our Unifying Objective

Galatians 2:1–10

Beware the Ides. Julius Caesar had been successful militarily, defeating the external threats to Rome. But he failed to grasp the threat from his internal associates. *Et tu, Brute?* Then fall Caesar.

There are external threats to the church and the Gospel of Jesus around which she unites, and there are internal threats. Usually the external threats are easier to spot, but the internal threats may only to be spied out after their cancer has already taken root. Here in Galatia, we have false brothers, pseudo-Christian spies secretly slipping in to seduce the believers back to circumcision and ceremonial slavery. I admit I had fun writing that, but I didn't have to work very hard, because that is pretty much in v. 4. False brothers, pseudo-Christians, adding human requirements to the Gospel, as we have seen in the last few weeks. Paul hotly condemned them in chapter 1.

Today we see again the Apostle reminding the Galatians of his first-hand, God-given authority as an Apostle, and focus on **(1) the objective**, or the goal of our mission — **the truth of the Gospel** in v. 5; **(2) Internal threats** to goal of the Gospel; and **(3) the Outward impact** of laser focus on the Gospel.

Recall the last part of Ch. 1: Paul defends his Apostolic authority, called by God to preach God's Gospel for God's glory. It is not man's Gospel, nor Paul's Gospel. He received it through revelation from Jesus, himself. Now in chapter 2 he continues testifying of his provenance and authority. We see that the revelation of the Gospel he received is the same Gospel the other Apostles received.

2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ 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. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

2

PRAY: Give us undivided hearts that we may fear your name, and a watching world may know you.

The objective, The Goal = The Gospel

Just about in the center of these 10 narrative verses we have what is to be our focus: The truth of the Gospel, and critical nature of preserving that truth from all attacks for all generations. We will come back to the opening verses in a minute, let's start with the goal, the objective in mind.

v. 5 — to them [that is, these false brothers and false teachers] **we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.**

Here is the bullseye of Paul's calling and ministry: the preservation of the truth of the Gospel.

We cannot over-remind ourselves of what the Good News of the Gospel is, that Holy God undertakes to extend grace and peace to rebellious, condemned sinners through the atoning work of Jesus Christ, who gave himself to die as a substitute for those who believe in him, who put their faith in him. Because of this finished work, those who believe in Christ are delivered from this present evil age. It is all the work of God, and he alone gets glory. There is no human contribution, no righteousness than can be added to what Jesus completed, as though he left something undone. We see that in Galatians 1:3, and it is the consistent, unwavering message of the entire New Testament. In **v. 4** we see the folly of the false brothers who distorted the Gospel: They thought they were spiritual, but were actually deceived and deceptive dupes of Satan, enslaved to legalism that cannot save. Let us be warned by their error.

The Gospel must be right; eternal souls depend on faithful preaching and teaching of the Gospel, and a right understanding of it. There is only one way to the Father, one way to salvation, and it is through Jesus, because he is the spotless Lamb of God offered up for the sin of many. His was the only perfect life, and therefore the only acceptable sacrifice to pay for the imperfect, the sinful. Jesus asserts this about himself in **John 14:6 — Jesus said to him, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.**

That is brittle. It is unaccommodating. It is not inclusive, but exclusive. There is no diversity of ways. This cuts against the spirit of the age. But we must come to grips with the fact that God did not have to make any way; he would have been proven righteous in condemning every single treasonous rebel

3

who committed even one single traitorous act against his holy rule and reign... and every single one of us has committed hundreds of thousands of them.

Do you see why, in light of this, that fidelity to the truth of the Gospel is essential, and why Paul cannot stop banging this drum? Failure here is failure everywhere.

The Gospel is our rally point. It is the stackpole and unifying factor in our mission together at Redeemer's Grace Church, as it is for every true church. We are to study it; we are to think and speak accurately concerning it. It is to be preserved and faithfully passed down. There is no greater doctrine than the doctrine of justification through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

Alistaire Begg had a compelling illustration about the need to be clear and accurate about the Gospel, and I share it with you. Think of a seasoned surgeon who has with him in the operating room a junior surgeon. Think of the careful precision at work in cutting through this tissue, but not that; separating this layer and not anything beyond; repairing or removing only exactly what must be done, knowing that a slight deviation, an imprecise trajectory of a scalpel could slice something that could kill the patient before the blood loss could be stanchied. And as he is explaining carefully his technique, he hears his trainee behind him carrying on and twittering about with the nurses, talking about where they are going Friday night. And he says, "Hey. Hey, hey... fix your eyes here. Give your attention here. What are you doing focusing on what cannot bring life? Do you want to be a surgeon? Do you want to be an instrument of life?"

Do you want to be an instrument in God's hand who brings the life-giving Good News of the Gospel to those who are perishing apart from Christ? Do you? Then give your attention here, not to whether or not someone agrees with you politically or on some 3rd tier doctrine. Don't give yourself to distractions about issues that do not have the power to save. But do give yourself to carefully knowing and preserving this soul-saving Gospel, even though the world rages against it. Give yourself to it whatever it costs. Agreeing with men in their objections to the exclusivity of Christ may win a temporary friend, but it will also leave them blissfully traveling the broad road to destruction. In the end, it will be the truth of this Gospel — that we are made right with God through faith in Jesus — that endures and delivers people from the dominion of darkness into the kingdom of the Beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

4

The good news of the Good News is that it is simple. Jesus paid it all. Sin had left a crimson stain; he washed it white as snow. Come now to Christ. Look away from yourself to Christ, who was lifted up on a cross for your sin. Believe in him and you will be saved.

That is clear. It may be unpopular in that it even presents an objective standard of righteousness in Christ... but it is not hard to understand.

Having seen the clear importance of the truth of the Gospel, let's see how Paul combats those who assaulting the Gospel by adding ceremonial ritual and human tradition to it. **Verses 1–3** describe this trip Paul takes to Jerusalem to meet with the pillars of the Jerusalem church, as Peter, James, and John are referred to in v. 9. He is going to expose and correct the error and folly of the false teachers who are attacking the church from within. Both the Gospel message and messenger are at risk from an internal threat.

Internal Threat to the Gospel

The central aspect of the Judaizer's false teaching was circumcision, which was required under the Old Covenant Law, as described in Genesis 17 and other places. They continued to require it under the New Covenant. The Jews had performed this cutting ritual on the foreskin of the flesh for millennia as a sign — a sign— of God's redemptive covenant with them. But a New Covenant was instituted by Christ the night before he was betrayed and crucified. It was not a sign, but a reality. The new covenant involved the cutting away of the spiritually dead heart of stone and the giving of a new heart of flesh that will love and serve God. The Judaizers were still relying on the old ceremonies that were shadows and pointers to what was completed in Christ. Christ paid the price for sin and gives a new heart to his people, as described in **Colossians 2:11** and following:

¹¹ In [Christ] you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, ¹² having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. ¹³ And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, ¹⁴ by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

Circumcision is the central issue here, but we could plug in any legalistic thing, any added piece that is intended to improve appearances or earn favor, but actually reduces the freedom found in Christ.

5

So Paul shrewdly presents the object lesson of Barnabas and Titus. Barnabas was a Jew and well known to the believers in Jerusalem. But Titus was a Greek, likely unknown to the Pillar Apostles in Jerusalem, and someone who had come to faith in Christ through Paul's ministry.

So he presents Exhibit A — Barnabas — and Exhibit B — Titus.

- Exhibit A, a circumcised Jew gloriously saved by grace through faith in Christ.
- And Exhibit B, an uncircumcised Greek, gloriously saved by grace through faith in Christ — a partner in the Gospel, and a budding pastor.

In light of the evident work of grace in both men's lives, how can anyone make the argument that Titus's salvation was of a lesser quality than Barnabas's because Titus had not been brought under the knife of an Old Testament ritual.

Confrontation has a place.

We have an enemy who is scheming against us individually, and is scheming against the church corporately. Wolves can rise up from within the body as easily as from without. As Paul bids a final farewell to the Ephesians elders in **Acts 20**, he cautions and prepares them for battle with the internal threat of fierce wolves who would come in among them and not spare the flock. When threats crop up within the church, we should not be surprised. Agreement in, and unity around the purity of the Gospel is critical. When someone or something threatens the Gospel, or threatens to distract us from the objective goal of the Gospel, that threat is to be confronted and corrected. It's not pleasant, but it's spiritual warfare in defense of the only soul-saving Gospel. We ought not be surprised that deadly threats would arise against what God has appointed to save sinners from the dominion of death. Paul fights for it here. You may remember that John, in his first epistle, and as a very old man had to stir himself against the false teachers infiltrating the church in the 80s. Here we are in Galatia, probably in 48 ad, less perhaps 15 years after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, a deadly error is being promulgated. If the apostles had to deal with it then, it is likely we will have to deal with it, too.

Confrontation has a place. But let's be sure it's the right place. When conflict and confrontation arise, let's each do a self-check to be sure that what we are opposing and confronting is actually what we must confront and oppose. Obviously the Gospel is a critical, top-tier issue. We are to maintain unity in and around the Gospel at all costs. But we are not called to oppose, call out, and confront over differences of opinion about things that do not have eternal consequence. **Romans 14** gives clear teaching in this area. One esteems a day of the week of greater spiritual significance than another. Someone else doesn't. Someone avoids eating meat offered to idols because it seems like

6

they are participating in the idol worship by purchasing it. Another buys the meat used in idol worship and fixes it for supper because meat is meat, and not idolatrous in itself. These are not things over which to fight — they are morally neutral, and we are to be **eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace** over disputable matters. (Ephesians 4)

Cancel culture provokes us to divide over things culturally, or ethnically, or politically in order to show how virtuous one is over another. Saints, brothers and sisters, Church, let's not be conformed to the image of the world in this regard. The Gospel is our call to unity — and we fight for that. Let worldly or disputable matters that produce conflict be engaged by worldly, disputable people. That's not us. Those things are actually anti-Gospel. Disunity is anti-evangelistic, leaving sinners in darkness.

Consider the high priestly prayer of Jesus that we read in the Call to Worship in **John 17**.

John 17:20–23 — ²⁰“I do not ask for these only, but also for those who will believe in me through their word, ²¹ that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, ***so that the world may believe that you have sent me.*** ²² The glory that you have given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, ²³ I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, **so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me.**

The integrity of the Gospel, that sinful people can be reconciled to a Holy God and made one with him — the integrity of this Gospel is put on manifest display in the church of Christ in the unity of believers and their love for each other. If sinners who claim to have experienced the redeeming love of God, and claim to be reconciled to God and sanctified in Christ cannot love and get along with each other, who they can see, how can a watching world ever believe that anyone has been reconciled to a God they cannot see. We are united in and through the Gospel which is the power of God to salvation. Threats to that, whether internal or external call us to quash the attack. Let's be careful about quashing what is not quash-worthy. In the essential of the Gospel, unity. In non-essentials, charity and liberty.

Lastly commitment to Gospel unity produces an Outward Impact.

Outward Impact of the Gospel

Gospel fidelity — faithfulness to justification by faith in Christ — produces brotherhood, confidence in the Gospel work of others, expansion of mission, and practical care for poor and outcast.

v. 6 and following — James, Peter, and John added nothing to Paul. That’s an important phrase because the Judaizers were exactly saying that the Gospel Paul preached needed circumcision added to it. As they met with Paul and he presented the Gospel as he received it through revelation from Christ, their response was, Paul, you got it right. What you have been entrusted with is what we have been entrusted with. What you are preaching is exactly what we received from the Lord.

We are united in Christ, by the Gospel of grace, for the purpose of mission. That produces the brotherhood of all believers — and sisters, too.

Unity around the Gospel produces confidence in the work of others to advance the Kingdom as God has assigned them to. And the assignments can be different.

Peter is sent to Jews. Paul is sent to the Gentiles. Careful unity in preserving and preaching the Gospel leads to Gospel partnerships that are joyful and advance God’s kingdom. It doesn’t produce uniformity: “This is what I understand God’s call to be, and if you are really committed to the Gospel, you’ll do it like I am.” We don’t insist everyone conforms to our assignment — that’s moving toward legalism and away from freedom in Christ. Gospel unity produces confidence in the Gospel-centered work of others while we each serve with freedom in places God has called us. Missionaries in Africa or China do not preach and evangelize like we do in west Wichita. It would be silly for them to do so. But their Gospel faithfulness produces missional cooperation even in a different contextualized approach. This is why missionaries and church planters go through probing assessments to certain of Gospel fidelity so that we can extend them the right hand of fellowship with no reservation and send them out to advance the kingdom with delight and with dollars.

Lastly, Gospel fidelity produces practical care for the poor and outcast, as v. 10 says. This should bring echoes of the end of James 1 that we have studied in our groups. God sees and cares for the poor and outcast. As his ambassadors, we are to do the same. There was a famine in Judea — among Jewish Christians. Paul collected an offering from the Gentile Christians to provide for their Jewish brothers, thus modeling unity in Christ and becoming the hands and feet of Christ to these saints. Does the Gospel shape your giving in regards to the poor. The Apostles would say to us, “Remember the poor.” Let our response be, “Yes, the very thing we were eager to do.”

PRAY Gospel Thread