

The Grace-Centered Gospel

Galatians 2:1-21

Introduction

The story is told of two men riding a tandem bicycle up a steep hill. After much effort, they finally made it to the top of the hill. The front rider said, “That was a tough ride.” To which the second rider replied, “Sure was, and if I had not kept the brake on we might have slipped backwards.”

The two were working against each other. In a similar manner this concept of grace plus good works in order to be saved are contrary to each other. The two will never work together. Throughout the Bible, Paul often argued against the teaching that one must have faith in Jesus, but also adopt and abide by the customs of the Mosaic Law. This was a false teaching that plagued the early church. Here in the book of Galatians, he deals with false teaching that it is faith plus works of the law and affirms a person a justified by faith in Christ. Salvation is a done deal the moment you put your trust in Jesus to save you! Anything else added is a false Gospel.

Background

Before diving into the text, I want to cover the background information to better understand what brought this text on.

- Galatians is likely the first book written in our New Testament. It is Paul’s earliest letter written around A.D 49.
- Galatians was written because the churches of that region were facing a theological crisis. People known as Judaizers came into the region and caused conflict with false teachings. The essential truth of justification by faith rather than by human works was being denied by the Judaizers—legalistic Jews who insisted that Christians must keep the Mosaic Law.

- In particular, Judaizers insisted on circumcision as a requirement for Gentiles who wished to be saved. In other words, convert to Judaism first, and then you can become a Christian. When Paul learned that this heresy was being taught to the Galatian churches, he composed an epistle to emphasize our liberty in Christ and to counter the perversion of the Gospel that the Judaizers promoted.

The situation can be read in Acts chapter 15. Let's look at a portion of this.

Acts 15:1-11 (1) And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved. (2) When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. (3) And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren. (4) And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. (5) But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses. (6) And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter. (7) And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe. (8) And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us; (9) And put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith. (10) Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? (11) But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

My last message over Philemon I introduced the structure of how Paul wrote his letters which were custom in that day:

1. There would be a greeting. Where he simply introduced himself and identify his recipients.
2. A thanksgiving section in the form of prayer. ("I thank my God. . . we give thanks . . .")

3. Then the body of the letter to provide content.

(I don't want you to be ignorant/I want you to know).

4. Then the ethical instruction to provide commands and behavior change in light of the content.

(I beseech you/I urge you)

5. Finally a closing of the letter.

What makes Galatians unique in comparison to majority of his letters is he leaves out the thanksgiving part and immediately begins to rebuke them. With the Gospel being compromised, there was not much to be thankful about.

(Reading of the text)

Galatians 2:1-21 (1) Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. (2) And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain. (3) But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: (4) And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: (5) To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. (6) But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me: (7) But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (8) (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:) (9) And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. (10) Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do. (11) But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed. (12) For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision. (13) And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their

dissimulation. (14) But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? (15) We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, (16) Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. (17) But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid. (18) For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. (19) For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God. (20) I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (21) I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

In the previous chapter, Paul addresses two issues that troubled him:

1. The Judaizers came in to the region of Galatia and taught Gentiles had to become Jews first in order to be saved.
2. The Judaizers questioned and challenged Paul's apostleship.

The requirements of an Apostle were threefold:

1. One had to be a witness of Jesus after His resurrection.
2. One had to be personally chosen by Jesus Christ for Apostleship.
3. One had given the ability to perform signs and wonders.

Paul certainly had these qualifications. Because of these requirements, we do not hold the office of an Apostle continues.

This office of Apostleship is not to be confused with the requirement among to be among the twelve Apostles. The qualifications can be found in Acts 1 where Matthias was appointed in the place of Judas.

Acts 1:21-26 (21) Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, (22) Beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection. (23) And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. (24) And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen, (25) That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place. (26) And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

1. The candidate was required to be someone who followed Jesus during his entire earthly ministry, beginning from Jesus' baptism by John to Jesus' ascension into heaven (Acts 1:21– 22a).
2. The candidate was required to have seen Jesus after His resurrection (Acts 1:22b).
3. The candidate needed to have been appointed by the Lord Jesus himself (Acts 1:24– 25).

In this section of the letter to the Galatians, Paul continues his defense of his Apostleship by describing his experience with the Jerusalem council.

Outline

I. The circumstance of Paul's defense of the Gospel, vv. 1-10.

A. Paul describes his second trip to Jerusalem, vv. 1-2.

1. In Galatians 1:18-19, Paul described a trip he made to Jerusalem three years after he met Jesus on the road to Damascus.

2. In the previous chapter, he demonstrated that his Gospel came by a revelation from Jesus, not from man, not even from the apostles in Jerusalem.

Two visits to Jerusalem over 14 years shows that Paul did not sit at the feet of the disciples of Jesus to learn.

3. His companions on this trip were Barnabus and Titus.

- a. Both men were well respected by the Jerusalem counsel.
- b. Paul and Barnabus' partnership began during his first trip in Jerusalem.
- c. Titus was a Gentile convert under Paul who became an effective minister.

4. He describes his trip as being by revelation.

- a. This expresses direction of God.
- b. He did not go because any man called him to come; it was because God told him to.
- c. This trip to Jerusalem is most likely the one mentioned in Acts 11:27-30, when Paul brought a gift from Christians in other cities to the Christians in Jerusalem, who suffered under famine.

5. He communicated to those "of reputation" the Gospel privately.

- a. The ones of reputation point to the leaders, including, Peter, John and James the brother of Jesus.
- b. Paul had no doubt he had the true Gospel.
- c. He wanted to consult the leaders and be on the same page with Gospel.
- d. The idea behind "running in vain" refers to there being disunity.

B. The conflict over Titus' circumcision, vv. 3-4.

1. Paul's point is that the leadership in Jerusalem accepted Titus, a Gentile convert, even though he was not circumcised in accord with the Mosaic law.

2. This shows that the Jerusalem leadership accepted Paul's gospel of grace.

3. False brethren sneaked there way in attempt to bring them into "bondage."

4. The implication here is they demanded Titus to be circumcised.

5. Notice the plural language "we and us." Paul could easily dismiss this and let it be Titus' issue because he himself is a Jew. However, any case the message of the gospel was compromised, it was not just bondage for the Gentiles, but bondage for everyone who followed Jesus. (Baptism illustration).

6. They came in "privily" meaning by secret.

7. No false teacher wears the label false teacher or announces it. (Some are easier to identify based on the content of their teaching).

C. The response to the conflict, vv. 5-6.

1. Paul did not give them the time of day.

2. This is not pride or stubbornness by Paul, this was a serious matter.

3. Do not hear out false teachers, do not give them the time of day.

4. He did this for the sake of the true Gospel to continue.

5. Those who were counted as famous Christians (those who seemed to be somewhat) did not add to Paul's credibility.

a. Paul's point here is his gospel or Apostolic credentials did not depend on any sort of approval or influence from men, even influential men.

b. He reminds that God shows no favoritism. There is no such thing to God as a favorite Christian.

D. The Jerusalem leader's approval of Paul's ministry, vv. 7-10.

1. The leaders recognized Paul's specific calling to the preach the Gospel to Gentiles.
2. Peter's specific calling was the Gospel to the Jewish people.
3. These are not exclusive callings. It does not mean Paul only would preach the Gospel to Gentiles, but it was his primary ministry.
4. The leaders in Jerusalem recognized the impact Paul had on Gentiles and sent Barnabas to assist.
5. Note: Cephas and Peter are the same person. Cephas comes from Aramaic while Peter comes from the Greek version. Both are used interchangeably and mean "rock or stone."
6. They approved Paul's ministry, knowing that Paul did not require the Gentiles to come under the Mosaic Law to find favor with God.
7. The only caution the Jerusalem leaders had was for Paul to remember the poor, which he did often and made great effort to.

Note:

Since this text has used the term Gospel repeatedly, let's define what the true Gospel is.

The Gospel comes from the Greek Word εὐαγγέλιον. The word literally means "good news or good message." But what is that specific good news? There are many good news from God in the Bible, but there is only one specific true Gospel. Paul gives a clear definition of the Gospel in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4:

(1) Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; (2) By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. (3) For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; (4) And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus for our sins, and by trusting in Jesus, you will be saved. That is the true Gospel, it is power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes (Romans 1:16). That is the Gospel Paul is talking about every time he says it. This is such a crucial message that we cannot ever afford to compromise. Unfortunately, it is a message that is compromised too often.

II. The open rebuke for the consistency of the Gospel, vv. 11-14.

A. Peter's hypocrisy in Antioch, vv. 11-12.

1. Paul opposed him to his face over and issue with Peter.
2. Before these Judaizers (men from James) came into Antioch, Peter associated with Gentiles, but when they came he separated himself out of fear.
 - a. This is not to assume James the brother of Jesus is responsible, but these are men who associated themselves with James.
 - b. The motivation of fear begs the question: Who are you going to fear, God or man? When you give into peer pressure, think about who you want to please.
3. Peter is responsible for some of the conflict!

4. This is unfortunate because it was Peter who God used to welcome Gentiles into the church with Cornelius.

5. Peter had no issue with Gentiles getting saved and did not abide by the belief of faith plus works of the law, but his actions spoke as if he did not recognize Gentiles as brethren.

B. The bad example Peter set, v. 13.

1. Along with Peter, other Jews dissembled themselves from Gentiles,

2. Barnabus also went along with Peter and the Jews.

a. A well trusted and dear from of Paul also failed this test.

b. Even a someone as Barnabus described as a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith can fail tremendously.

3. Leaders, what kind of example are you setting for other believers?

4. We might be surprised that Peter, who did know better, did this; but we are only surprised if we don't believe what God says about the weakness and corruption of our flesh.

C. Paul's response to Peter's behavior.

1. Paul publicly rebuked Peter over this.

2. At the foundation, this wasn't an issue of seating arrangements at the church potluck. It was not about table manners and being a good host or about being sensitive to another brother's conscience. Paul saw the issue for what it was; it was about the truth of the gospel.

3. Their actions were declaring you can only be right with God if you put yourself under the demands of the Law of Moses.

4. Paul's words were powerful: "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of the Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

- a. If Peter himself were not keeping the customs of the Mosaic Law, how could he expect Gentiles to?
- b. This scene was a big deal and necessary for a public rebuke.

III. The affirmation of justification by faith, vv. 15-16.

A. No person is justified by their works.

1. "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles."
2. Paul is saying that even Jews ought to know that their approval from God has never come from keeping the law.
3. The word justified is a legal term that comes from the same root word as "righteousness." In the legal concept the person who is justified is the one who gets the verdict in a court of law. In the Biblical sense, it means getting the favorable verdict before God. It means to be declared righteous!
4. The moment you put your trust in Jesus to save you, you are justified – God declares you righteous based on Christ's work. If he says you are righteous, what would that make you?

B. A person is justified by faith in Jesus.

1. I want to know it is not exactly your faith that justifies you, it is object of your faith by which you are justified – the blood of Jesus.
 - a. Roman 5:1 Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

b. Roman 5:9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

2. Many will seek to be justified by their deeds before God, but not one person will pass the test.

IV. The identification of being crucified with Christ, vv. 17-21.

A. Paul's answer to possible objections raised by Judaizers, vv. 17-19.

1. Since we are justified, we are still found sinners, does that make Christ the minister of sin?

a. God forbid – Absolutely not! The phrase he used in the original μή γίνομαι is the strongest way to say “no.”

b. Here, Paul is using a common style of argument known as “reduction ad absurdum – Latin phrase for “reduced to absurdity.”

2. The idea that we are made right before God by faith in Jesus alone was not real enough. After all, Christians still struggled with sin. How could they have the “accepted by God” issue settled if they still battled sin.

a. The answer is simple, because salvation is not of yourselves.

b. We are accepted of God because of Christ in us!

3. The most common objection to eternal security – in other words, once you are saved, you cannot lose it is the idea it gives you a license to sin – I can just do whatever I want, and I will always be saved. (Sound familiar?) This objection is not foreign to Scripture.

a. Romans 6:1-2 (1) What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? (2) God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin,

live any longer therein?

- b. When you were born again, you became a new creation. The new you is created unto righteousness and true holiness. When your flesh sins, your Spirit does not put up with. You are not going to want to go off and just do whatever you want!
- c. Salvation will always be based upon Christ, never you. If I am not good enough to be saved, neither will I ever be good enough to keep saved. It is Jesus who preserves our salvation!

4. Paul's answer is brilliant. If he were to build again a way to God through keeping the Law of Moses, then he would make himself a transgressor.

- a. Essentially, Paul says there is more sin in trying to find acceptance before God by our law-keeping than there is sin in everyday life as a Christian.
- b. By trying to become right with God through your own effort, you become further from God.

5. As new believers, we are dead to law – we have freedom in Jesus.

- a. This does not give us reason to always break the law.
- b. This gives us the freedom to go above and beyond the law!
- c. The law in its context, reflects the holy character of God.

There was nothing wrong with the law. It is not the law that died, but Paul died to the law. It shows us that we can never achieve that standard of living, it shows us our need for a Savior!

B. Our true identity in Christ, vv. 20-21.

1. This is when Paul died to the law – He has been crucified with Christ.
 - a. This ought to be a verse we all commit to memory!
 - b. You are no longer your own!
2. It is no longer Paul, but Christ who lives in him.
3. Our old life, lived under the law, is dead. Now we are alive to Jesus Christ, and Jesus is alive in us.
4. The life he now lives in the flesh is by faith in the Son of God – not by law keeping.
5. The one life of the one who loved and gave himself for us.
 - a. What a verse! The love Jesus has for us and the sacrifice he made is the motivation!
 - b. With everything God has done for us, how could we not give it all back to Him?
6. If righteousness came by the law, then Christ's death on the cross is meaningless.
 - a. This is why I have such passion against positions that teach faith plus human effort to be saved.
 - b. To hold to anything addition to grace through faith in Jesus is to say Christ's death was not enough!

Application

The idea of faith plus keeping the Mosaic Law is not something no longer practiced. It is existing in many different forms in denominations out there claiming to be Christian. Faith plus baptism – faith plus abiding by seven sacraments – faith plus saying certain prayers – faith plus church membership – faith, but also must keep living it or you will no longer be saved. The list goes on. Salvation is of the Lord, God offers it to everyone of us through His Son dying on the cross for our sin. He took the punishment that should have been ours. He did not stay dead though; three days later he rose again conquering sin and proving exactly who claimed to be – God in the flesh who came to take away the sins of the whole world. If you put your trust in Him to save you, the Bible says you will have eternal life that begins immediately!

Reflection Questions

1. Have you been trying make your way to God by your own effort?
2. Have you been trying to earn favor with God by your own effort?
3. What kind of example are you setting for other believers? Are you a “do as I say, or do as I do type of believer?”
4. Have you been giving in to peer pressure over your faith? If so, think about you seek to please, God or man?
5. How does being justified by faith alone in Christ motivate you to live I life pleasing to God?