

Galatians 2:1–21

Justified by Faith, United in Christ, Free From Bondage

Introduction: When the Gospel Is Tested

Galatians chapter 2 brings us face-to-face with one of the earliest and most critical crises in church history. The issue was not personality, culture, or preference. It was the gospel itself. The question was simple but explosive: *Must Gentile believers become Jews in order to be saved?*

Paul writes not as a detached theologian, but as a shepherd defending the freedom of his flock. What unfolds in this chapter shows us that the gospel of grace is not preserved by silence, compromise, or hierarchy, but by courage, clarity, and faithfulness to Christ.

1. The Gospel Confirmed, Not Corrected

Galatians 2:1–5

“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.”

Paul returns to Jerusalem, not because he doubts his message, but because God directs him. Titus, a Greek believer, becomes a living test case. If circumcision were required for salvation, Titus would have been compelled to submit to it.

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

The pressure came not from God, but from false brethren.

“Who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage.”

Paul’s response is decisive.

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

The gospel does not bend to intimidation. Grace cannot coexist with coercion. Paul stood firm—not for his own reputation, but for the freedom of every believer who would come after.

2. Authority Without Intimidation

Galatians 2:6–10

“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man.”

Paul refuses to be overawed by reputation. God is not impressed by titles, rank, or hierarchy. Spiritual authority is measured by faithfulness, not prominence.

Yet when the leaders in Jerusalem—James, Peter, and John—recognized the grace God had given to Paul, they responded rightly.

“They gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.”

Unity did not require uniformity. Peter was called primarily to the Jews; Paul to the Gentiles. Different callings, one gospel. Different audiences, one Lord.

The only request made was practical and loving:

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

Grace never produces indifference. It produces generosity.

3. When Truth Requires Confrontation

Galatians 2:11–14

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

Peter’s failure was not doctrinal but practical. He had freely eaten with Gentile believers until pressure arrived from Jerusalem. Then fear took over.

“Fearing those who were of the circumcision.”

His withdrawal communicated a lie—that Gentile believers were somehow second-class Christians. Even Barnabas was swept up in the hypocrisy.

Paul’s concern was not Peter’s reputation, but the integrity of the gospel.

“They were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel.”

Sometimes love requires public correction. Silence in the face of error allows bondage to spread.

4. Justification by Faith, Not by Law

Galatians 2:15–16

Paul now states one of the clearest gospel truths in all of Scripture.

“Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ... for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.”

Even those who possessed the law knew it could not save. Obedience exposes sin; it does not erase guilt. No amount of moral effort can reconcile a sinner to a holy God.

Jesus saved us when He shed His blood on the cross. His resurrection declares that He is God, Savior, and Lord. Justification rests entirely on what He has done, not on what we do.

5. Dead to the Law, Alive to God

Galatians 2:17–19

Paul rejects the idea that grace promotes sin.

“Certainly not! For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.”

Returning to law-based righteousness after embracing Christ does not produce holiness—it produces condemnation.

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

The law does one thing perfectly: it pronounces death on the guilty. Once its sentence is fulfilled in Christ, its authority over the believer ends.

6. The Heart of the Christian Life

Galatians 2:20

This verse is the heartbeat of Galatians.

“I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me.”

The old self—driven by pride, fear, and self-effort—has died.

“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.”

The Christian life is not self-improvement; it is Christ-indwelling. Faith is not a one-time act, but a daily posture of dependence.

7. The Cross Leaves No Alternative

Galatians 2:21

Paul ends with a statement that allows no compromise.

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

The cross declares once and for all that salvation cannot be achieved by rules, rituals, or regulations. If any other path were possible, God would have answered Jesus’ prayer in the garden. The fact that Christ went to the cross proves that grace is the only way.

Practical Application for Believers

- Guard the gospel from subtle legalism
- Refuse to measure spirituality by external rules
- Walk in humble dependence on Christ daily
- Stand for truth even when it is uncomfortable
- Keep your eyes on Jesus, not on yourself

A Challenge for the Church

Do not trade a loving relationship with God for a legal one. Having begun in the Spirit, do not attempt to mature by the flesh. Stand fast in the liberty by which Christ has made you free.

An Invitation to Non-Believers

You cannot be made right with God by effort, morality, or religion. Jesus Christ shed His blood on the cross for your sins. He rose from the dead, proving that He is Lord.

Turn from sin. Trust in Him. Receive the gift of righteousness through faith—and you will be saved.

Closing Prayer

Father, thank You for the gospel of grace. Thank You that our standing before You rests not in what we do, but in what Christ has done. Help us to walk in freedom, truth, and love, always keeping our eyes on Jesus. Amen.