

The Book of Galatians

Lesson 3: Recognized by the Apostles -- Galatians 2:1–10

There is a particular kind of courage that does not make the news. It is not the courage of the battlefield but of the meeting room, the quiet refusal to nod along when everyone expects you to. Paul shows us that courage in this passage. He walks into Jerusalem, into a room full of the most respected leaders of the church, with a young Greek convert named Titus at his side, and he does not blink.

The pressure in that room was intense. A group Paul bluntly calls “false brothers” had slipped in, watching, waiting, hoping to catch the freedom of the gospel and put it back in chains. Their demand was simple and, to many, reasonable: surely this Gentile believer Titus should be circumcised, should take on the law of Moses, just to be safe, just to keep the peace. It would have been so easy to give in on one small point.

Paul would not yield, not even for an hour. He understood that this was not a small point at all. If Titus had to be circumcised to be fully accepted, then the gospel of grace was finished, and a gospel of grace-plus-law had taken its place. So he stood his ground, and the outcome was beautiful. The pillars of the church, James, Peter, and John, looked at Paul’s gospel and added nothing to it. They simply recognized it as the same gospel they preached and shook his hand.

This passage is about the unity of the one true gospel and the courage it sometimes takes to protect it. But notice how it ends, not with a doctrinal victory lap, but with a tender request: remember the poor. The same Paul who would die on a hill to protect the truth of the gospel was eager to open his hands to the hungry. Truth and love were never at war in him. As we study, watch how firmly held truth and tenderly opened hands belong together.

Group Discussion: Paul refused to compromise even under pressure from sincere, respected people, “so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you” (2:5). When is it loving to refuse to compromise, and how can a church tell the difference between protecting the gospel and simply being stubborn about preferences?

Personal Reflection: The passage ends with the request to “remember the poor,” which Paul was eager to do (2:10). How well does your own life hold together a firm grip on the truth and an open hand toward people in need?

Read Galatians 2:1–10

Study Questions

1. Paul went up to Jerusalem “by revelation” and set before the leaders the gospel he preached, “in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain” (2:1–2). Why did

Paul seek this recognition, and what does the leaders' response reveal about the unity and the single source of the apostolic gospel?

2. Titus, a Greek believer, "was not forced to be circumcised" (2:3), a living test case for the freedom of the gospel. Where do you feel pressure today to add cultural expectations or man-made requirements to what it means to truly follow Jesus?
3. Paul says "false brothers" were "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" (2:4). What is this freedom in Christ, and why did Paul regard the demand to add law-keeping as a return to slavery?
4. Paul "did not yield in submission even for a moment" (2:5). Where in your own life do you need backbone to hold to the truth when the pressure to go along, keep the peace, or fit in is strong?
5. Paul reports that those who seemed influential "added nothing to me" (2:6). What does it mean that the gospel needs no human additions, and how does this confirm that we are accepted by grace and not by supplementing Christ?
6. The leaders recognized that God was at work through Paul among the Gentiles just as through Peter among the Jews. Whose ministry or gifts have you been slow to recognize or affirm, and how might you encourage a fellow worker in Christ this week?
7. James, Cephas, and John gave Paul and Barnabas "the right hand of fellowship," recognizing different fields of labor in the one gospel (2:7-9). What does this teach about genuine unity in the church, a unity that holds one gospel together with a variety of ministries?
8. Paul and Barnabas worked alongside other servants without rivalry or turf wars. Where are you tempted toward comparison, competition, or jealousy in serving God, and what would it look like to labor with others rather than against them?
9. Paul stood firm "so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you" (2:5), refusing to let circumcision and the works of the law be added to faith in Christ as the ground of acceptance with God. How do we preserve the truth of the gospel in our own day, holding firmly to the God-given response of faith, repentance, confession, and baptism, without either adding human conditions or subtracting what God has appointed?
10. Look back across the whole passage. Paul held the truth with an iron grip and held the poor with an open hand. Name one specific way Jesus is forming you to be both more faithful to the truth and more generous in love at the same time.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Acts 15:1-29, the Jerusalem council settling the question of the law and the Gentiles; Acts 11:27-30, the early church sending relief to believers in need; 2 Corinthians 8:1-9, generosity flowing from the grace of Christ; Ephesians 2:11-22, Jew and Gentile made one body in Christ; James 2:14-17, a faith that cares for the hungry and the poor.