

# GALATIANS 2

## *What A Mess!*

Have you ever been afraid of change? Change hits all of us in different ways. Some of us respond with excitement, others with fear, still others with anger and insurgence. Imagine being a devout, Jewish Christian of the day, and the same man who was devastating your churches and persecuting your people became a follower and apostle of Jesus Christ. This man was your

worst nightmare as a converted Jewish Christian! Now suddenly he is on your team? Not only that, he is preaching the message of Christ to non-Jewish people, Gentiles, and declaring that Jewish customs, laws, and practices, that were deemed necessary in the Old Covenant for salvation, are no longer required! This was a hard lump to swallow for many Jewish believers. Instead of responding in excitement over the simplicity, liberty, and hope Paul preached, they were upset and countermanded Paul's message.

The Judaizers, whom Paul is combating in this letter, accepted the apostles' teaching of Christ as Messiah, but believed Gentiles also had to adopt traditional Jewish practices to secure their salvation, primarily circumcision. "Those who urged circumcision on the churches of Galatia no doubt felt quite sincerely that if this practice went by default, even for Gentile believers, the continuity of the history of salvation was interrupted."<sup>1</sup> With this attitude in mind, it is a lot easier to understand why these men seemed determined to follow Paul and were going to put up a fight and make a stink wherever he went.

The first punch in this ring was to come against the validity of Paul's apostleship. If they could negate his apostleship, they would negate the gospel he was preaching and effectively impose their understanding of salvation on those adopting Christ as their Savior. Jewish followers of Christ would have agreed upon the terms of apostleship in those days, "To the Jew the word was well defined; it meant a special messenger, with a special status, enjoying an authority and commission that came from a body higher than himself."<sup>2</sup> Christ designated his twelve disciples, apostles (Luke 6:13, Mk 3:14), and commissioned them to teach in His name. When Paul came on the scene, they were the known apostles of the day, as the risen Christ had appointed them. Paul, given his background, had to go on a lengthy discourse about the validity of his apostleship and its divine origins in this chapter, not because he was proud and boasting, but to ensure that the gospel of grace he taught the Galatian churches would not be negated.

He greets the Galatians with the most unique greeting in all his letters: no prayer, praise, or thanksgiving, but rather an elaboration on himself, and an in depth "grace and peace" statement. This unusual greeting immediately tenders the spirit of urgency and alerts the reader to the purpose of his writing. He then gives a double curse to those preaching a counterfeit gospel and lastly proceeds to give a three-part alibi of his

### *Pre-Article Questions:*

1. How do you handle change? What has been one of the greatest changes in your life recently and how did you receive it?
2. Why do you think people react so strongly and negatively to change at times?

1. Bruce, F.F. The Epistle to the Galatians: A Commentary on the Greek Text. Michigan: William B. Eermands Publishing Company, 1982, 37.  
2. Stott, John. The Message of Galatians. Leicester, InterVarsity Press, 1968, 13.

post-conversion travels. This assures the reader that he did not spend time in Jerusalem first, having been taught and trained in the gospel through the other apostles. Instead he went to Arabia, went up to Jerusalem later and briefly, and then went to Syria and Cilicia.<sup>3</sup> In Acts 9:20, we learn that Paul spent some time in Damascus preaching. This has huge implications. The gospel revelation he received from Christ was defined enough for him to begin preaching it well before he met the other apostles. Afterward, when he went to Arabia, some suggest, “Those three years in Arabia were a deliberate compensation for the three years of instruction which Jesus gave the other apostles, but which Paul missed. Now he had Jesus to himself, as it were, for three years of solitude in the wilderness.”<sup>4</sup> The revelation of the gospel that Paul got was from the risen Christ (he refers to this unusual circumstance many times in his epistles; 1 Corinthians 9:1, 15:8) therefore validating his apostleship and authority to preach and teach the gospel to the Gentiles in the manner he set forth.

So it’s of the utmost importance that Paul’s role as an apostle and why it was contested is clearly understood as we read this combative and powerful letter. Paul was a true apostle of Christ sent to the Gentiles and we are all grateful for his ministry. If you are here tonight, you are a fruit of his preaching and teaching. Thanks be to God the death and resurrection of Christ opened the door of salvation by faith, not only for Jews, but for Gentiles too!

## Article Question:

1. If you were in Paul’s shoes and had just won many precious people to Jesus Christ, only to find that weeks or months later, someone came in and burdened them with a false teaching, undoing your positive impact, how would you have begun this letter?

## Galatians 1, NIV

Paul, an apostle—sent not from men nor by a man, but by Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised him from the dead—2 and all the brothers and sisters with me, To the churches in Galatia: 3 Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, 4 who gave himself for our sins to rescue us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, 5 to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen. 6 I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—7 which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. 8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God’s curse! 9 As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God’s curse! 10 Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ. 11 I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin. 12 I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ. 13 For you have heard of my previous way of life in Judaism, how intensely I persecuted the church of God and tried to destroy it. 14 I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people and was extremely zealous for the traditions of my fathers. 15 But when God, who set me apart from my mother’s womb and called me by his grace, was pleased 16 to reveal his Son in me so that I might preach him among the Gentiles, my immediate response was not to consult any human being. 17 I did not go up to Jerusalem to see those who were apostles before I was, but I went into Arabia. Later I returned to Damascus.

3. Stott, John. 34, 35.

4. Stott, John, 34.

18 Then after three years, I went up to Jerusalem to get acquainted with Cephas and stayed with him fifteen days. 19 I saw none of the other apostles—only James, the Lord’s brother. 20 I assure you before God that what I am writing you is no lie. 21 Then I went to Syria and Cilicia. 22 I was personally unknown to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. 23 They only heard the report: “The man who formerly persecuted us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy.” 24 And they praised God because of me.

## Study Questions:

1. Read Galatians 1:1-5, 1 Corinthians 1:1-4, Ephesians 1:1-3, and Philippians 1:1-4, how is his greeting in Galatians different than his greeting in these other letters? In what ways does his greeting link to his purpose for writing this letter?
2. What words or phrases from verses 3-5 impact your understanding of the gospel and why?
3. According to verses 6-7, what is going on in the churches of Galatia?
4. Why do you think both Christ and Paul judge false teaching so severely? (See Matthew 18:5-6 for example of Jesus)
5. In the 21st century what are some common ways the gospel is slanted or perverted? (Prosperity gospel, Grace being used as license to sin, or works for salvation-never doing enough to please God).
6. Re-read Galatians 1:10. In what ways does this statement impact you tonight? What spiritual truths help us overcome man pleasing that is opposed to pleasing God?
7. It is easy to water down truth to make others feel better about their sin or to not be offensive. How does Paul’s life and mission encourage you tonight in your own witness of the truths of the gospel to others around you?
8. Can you describe an experience of sharing the gospel or a hard truth from the scriptures with someone that went well? What helped you, how did you share it, and what did the Holy Spirit teach you through this?
9. Take time to pray that if there is any falsity in our understanding of the message of the Gospel, God would root it out tonight, and replace it with the truth of the gospel of grace. Let’s also pray against our constant struggle for approval from men and ask God to give us the spirit of the Apostles and boldness to share the gospel fearlessly this semester.

## Prayer Partner Assignment:

Meet with your prayer partner this week to read and discuss:

1. Read Acts 15. What takes place at the council of Jerusalem and why was this meeting so important?
2. What was accomplished at this meeting and who was on the same page after the meeting?
3. Where were Paul and Barnabas sent after the meeting?
4. What from Peter’s speech do you find encouraging and why?
5. What did you learn about Paul from reading this passage? Why do you think Paul went through the history of the Israelites in this message and in what ways was that impactful or important to those listening?
6. Paul’s past and giftings were the exact things God planned to use for his glory. He saw God move mightily among the Gentiles. What giftings or past pains and experiences in your life have you found God choosing to use lately to impact people?

## Scripture Memory:

Galatians 1:10  
Galatians 1:15-16