

Salvation through faith confirmed

Galatians 2:1-10

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As we study the book of Galatians it is helpful to realize that it is not really a book. It is a letter. It was written from the Apostle Paul to four churches located in the province of Galatia, in what would be modern day Turkey. Paul and his coworkers had started each of these churches. They had preached the Gospel of Jesus Christ and gathered those who believed. They had disciplined them and set apart leaders to guide the churches. They then had moved on to the next city to repeat the process.

Each of these churches were infiltrated by false teachers after Paul and his coworkers left. The false teachers were known as Judaizers. They taught that for a gentile to become a Christian they must first become a Jew. Their logic was based on the fact that the covenants, laws and rituals were for the Jews, so if one was to follow Jesus Christ, the Jewish messiah, they must first become Jews.

These Judaizers also sought to undermine Paul's teaching by discrediting him as an apostle and as a trustworthy teacher. In Galatians 1:11-24, Paul wrote of how the Gospel that he proclaimed was not from man, but was from Christ Himself. Paul also made it clear that he had not been sent out by any man or church, but by Christ Himself. Paul spoke with the authority of Christ.

Although these claims communicated the authority with which he spoke, it also made Paul vulnerable to those who considered him a heretic and blasphemer. They saw him as one who was independent, unaccountable, and not submitted to any church. Because of this Paul wrote of the trip that he had taken to Jerusalem to meet with the early church leaders who were held in highest regard by the early Christians (Galatians 2:1-2):

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²I 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.

Barnabas was a trusted friend to many in the Jerusalem church. He had been sent out by them initially to verify the claims in Antioch that Gentiles were receiving the Holy Spirit. Titus was a Christian Gentile who had never been circumcised.

Paul makes it clear that God had sent him to Jerusalem. He did not go to Jerusalem because the church had summoned him. Once he had arrived in Jerusalem he presented the Gospel that he had been proclaiming for years. This was the same Gospel that God had used to bring many to salvation and to start churches. Paul sought the confirmation of the leaders of the Jerusalem church, many whom had been disciples of Jesus. With this confirmation the Judaizers would lose any power they had to uproot the work of Paul.

The Judaizers claimed that one is saved by who he is and what he has done, but Paul declared the opposite. We are not saved because of who we are and what we have done. We are saved because of who Christ is and what He has done.

Without Christ we all are separated from God because of our sin. We are hopelessly lost and in need of a Savior. Scripture states our condition of sin over and over again:

- Ecclesiastes 7:20 – *“Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”*
- Psalm 143:2 – *“No one living is righteous before you.”*
- Isaiah 53:6 – *“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way.”*
- Jeremiah 17:9 – *“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?”*
- Romans 3:10-12 – *“None is righteous, no, not one; no one understands; no one seeks for God. All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”*
- 1 John 1:8-10 – *“If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”*

In light of these verses and our sinfulness there is no way that we can save ourselves. It is only through the work and the person of Jesus Christ that we can be saved. Any Gospel that gives credit to who we are or what we have done *“Nullifies the grace of God. For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose”* (Galatians 2:21).

Peter, in Acts 15, puts it in these words, “. . . *Why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.*”

Since the time of Moses and the Ten Commandments the Jews had never been able to live up to God’s commands and be a righteous people. What sense would it make to now demand the same of the gentiles as if they could earn their own salvation? As we read in Ephesians 2:8-9, “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.*”

Galatians 2 continues with these verses:

³But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴Yet 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—⁵to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶And 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. ⁷On 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), ⁹and 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. ¹⁰Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Titus, was a Gentile Christian. As evidence of the Jerusalem church leader’s approval of Paul’s gospel of grace, no one forced Titus to be circumcised. But some might question this by contrasting it to Acts 16:3. In Acts 16:3, Paul had Timothy circumcised. It may seem contradictory, but it was a different situation. Timothy was half-Jewish (father Greek) and Paul knew that, if Timothy was circumcised, that would give him the opportunity to reach out and minister to the Jewish people. Paul allowed Timothy to be circumcised because it gave Timothy entrance into Jewish places as one of them. He was not circumcised because the law demanded it. He was circumcised because love demanded it.

In verses 4 and 5 Paul writes how the Judaizers slipped in to “spy out our freedom in Christ,” but how Paul did not yield to them for even a moment. As believers, we should take note of this. For some, being a Christian means be soft, always yield, never take a stand, but that is not true. There is a time to take a stand. It is correct that, when we were born again, we surrendered all our rights. We no longer are our own. We belong to God. Our money, our plans, our career, our children, our future, everything that we have belongs to Christ. Because of that we no longer need to stand up for our own rights. At the same time, there are occasions when we must stand for the sake of the gospel or for God’s purposes. There is a time to yield and a time to stand. May we ask God for wisdom to know the difference.

In verse 6 we see Paul write that God shows no partiality. God does not give special favor to those who have money, beauty, or supposed significance in this world. As one reads in 1 Samuel 16:7, *“For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart.”*

Many of us think too highly of ourselves thinking surely God will show us favor. The rest of us think too lowly of ourselves, thinking surely God is angry with us. We would probably benefit by not thinking about ourselves at all. The less we think of ourselves and the more we think of God, the healthier and more stable our perspective of the world will be.

As we think of the gospel, we find the true perspective of who we are. We are utter sinners. This humbles us. We are also forgiven, children of the heavenly Father. His unconditional love brings us to the place where He gets all the credit and we get all the benefit. When our needs are met vertically in God, then we no longer are dependent on the approval of the world around us. We are free to serve God and disregard the world. This offers true freedom.

Paul then continues giving witness to the fact that after he had presented his gospel to the church leaders in Jerusalem, *“They added nothing to me.”* They agreed with Paul’s gospel to the extent that they saw no need to add anything more. In addition to this, Paul tells how James, Peter and John, *“the pillars of the Jerusalem church”*, gave a right hand of fellowship to both he and Barnabas. This right hand of fellowship was a sign of equality, partnership and support. The gospel that Paul preached was the same as Jesus had taught to James, Peter and John. He now had their full endorsement. The Judaizers would now have to submit to the decision that the Jerusalem church leaders had made and give Paul freedom to preach the gospel.

The leaders in Jerusalem encouraged the believers to continue helping the poor, and Paul was in agreement with this request.

In summary. We cannot earn the favor of God by who we are and what we have done. Our parents may be followers of Christ. Our country may be largely Christian. We may be a church leader or a missionary. We may give an offering to the church or work in the nursery. We may sing in the choir or serve coffee in the kitchen. But if we have never turned from our sin and believed in Jesus Christ, we are not saved. We must never forget. Our best deeds of *“righteousness”* are seen as filthy rags. Salvation is not based on who we are and what we have done. It is only through who Christ is and what He has done that we can be saved.

Today, will we put our trust fully in Jesus Christ and surrender to Him as the Lord and Savior of our lives?