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Bread of Life Baptist Church
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Galatians 2:1-10

Believing, Guarding, and Proclaiming the Gospel

This past week, I had the privilege of spending a whole day with other pastors from the other churches in our local association (the ABA). We usually meet every month, but this meeting was special. We spent the whole day talking about how our association of churches can be more and more focused on reaching the lost all throughout our region with the gospel by prioritizing our support for planting new churches in areas that don't have one, revitalizing current churches to become more biblically healthy and gospel centered, and supporting one another in our work of making disciples and carrying out the Great Commission. It was a very exciting and encouraging meeting!

At the end of the meeting, the guy leading it asked all of us to each separately write down our own one-sentence vision for what we should be trying to accomplish. We were to each write it down, in one sentence, in our own words, before standing it up and turning them in, so that they could all be read out loud at once. Now, what's the purpose of an exercise like that? It was so that we could get an accurate gauge on where everyone around the table was at. It was a way to see if everyone was on the same page, if we all had the same vision. It's one thing for just one guy to stand up and share a vision he has. It's quite another thing for several people to all have that same vision, and then share it at exactly the same time, and see that they all share the same vision in common.

We know this principle to hold true in many different walks of life. The results from one scientist's experiments may prove helpful or may not; but if dozens of scientists run the same experiment and get the same results, then there is a far greater likelihood of accuracy and consistency. If we here that a new policy in one school system or business produces results, that may mean it's worth trying, or it may just mean that it happened to work there; but if that same policy produces results in businesses and school systems all across the nation or world, well, then it carries much more weight, doesn't it? We find assurance in the fact that many different people, across time and in different places, have come to the same conclusion, or had the same experience, or hold to the same beliefs that we do. And, to a certain degree, this can be true of our confidence in the gospel message.

Now, I immediately need to qualify what I mean there. After all, doesn't that seem to contradict what we saw from last week's sermon text? Last week, as we looked at *Gal. 1:11-24*, we saw Paul argue the point that the gospel doesn't come from human beings, but directly from God, and backed up this claim with an account of his own life, showing how he received the gospel directly from Christ. He's doing so as a counter-argument to the claims of false teachers who had come to Galatia, claiming that the Gentile believers needed to be live under the Law of Moses (in addition to trusting the gospel of Christ) in order to truly be saved. They began undermining Paul's authority, probably claiming that Paul was not a true apostle and was preaching the wrong gospel. So, Paul countered their arguments by proclaiming that his gospel is true and authoritative because He received it directly from Christ, showing that he didn't get it from the Apostles in Jerusalem.

But at this point, the false teachers who opposed Paul could interject and say, "See? Paul's preaching a gospel completely different than the gospel being preached by the apostles in Jerusalem - by Peter, James, and John; by the Twelve who were directly taught by Christ himself, while still on earth! Surely, then, you shouldn't listen to Paul or trust his gospel!"

But again, we see Paul saying, "Not so fast!" After proving that he received his authoritative gospel directly from Christ, *independent* from the apostles and church leadership in Jerusalem, now he shows that his gospel and apostolic authority were, nevertheless, *affirmed* and *validated* by the apostles and leaders in Jerusalem. In other words: this passage shows us that Paul and the other apostles *all preached the exact same gospel*. And that means, there is only one, true, same gospel for all people - both Jews and gentiles. And that's exactly what we should expect. If Paul and the other Apostles *all received the gospel directly from Christ*, and if it's true, then *we expect them to all be preaching the same gospel!* And thankfully, that's exactly what we see in this passage; Paul and the Apostles in Jerusalem affirm one another's gospel as the only gospel; they guard the true meaning of the gospel, drawing out implications of the Law-Free gospel of Christ for us; they defend the true gospel against false teachers and challenges to the gospel, giving an example for us to follow;; and they affirm and support one another's gospel ministries, just as we should partner with others for the sake of the gospel as well. These are the four main points we see in our text today.

So let's start with the first main, overarching point:

I. There is Only One True Gospel (Gal. 2:1-9)

Last week, we left off with Paul's first visit to Jerusalem. Now, he fast-forwards the narrative fourteen years to his *second* visit to Jerusalem. The second time we see Paul visit Jerusalem after his conversion in the book of Acts is in Acts 11. In Acts 11, Paul had not yet embarked on his famous missionary journeys, but he had been doing gospel ministry for quite some time. He had been brought down by Barnabas to do ministry at the church in Antioch. This is where those who followed Christ were first called Christians because of how the church incredibly included both Jewish believers *and* gentile Christians, in what was probably the first visibly mixed church like this. But then, at the end of chapter 11, in verses 27-30, we're told that the prophet Agabus, from Jerusalem, prophesied that there would be a great famine. So, the church decides to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to take a contribution of money to help out the Christians there, who were generally poor.

This is probably the context for Gal. 2:1-10.. Paul tells us, in verses 1-2,, that he, Barnabas, and Titus went up to Jerusalem "because of a revelation." This is probably referring to the prophecy about a famine in Acts 11, that I just mentioned. While already in Jerusalem, Paul and his companions met "privately" with "those who seemed influential" (probably referring to the apostles, though maybe also including the elders, that is, pastors, of the church there).

He did so to "set before them... the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure that I was not running or had not run in vain." Now, this doesn't mean that Paul was having doubts about the truth of the gospel he received from Christ and was coming to make sure his gospel was right. No, of course not; we saw clearly last week that Paul made just the opposite point in chapter 1, 11-24. No, he knew he was preaching the only true gospel. But his "running" and "labor" was to preach the gospel among the Gentiles, and to do so in a way that Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians both believed in the *same gospel* and were members of the *exact same church*. But Paul knew that if the Apostles and leaders in Jerusalem preached a *different gospel* than Paul did - well, that would be disastrous, wouldn't it? People would have to ask, "Who's right? Paul, who first preached the gospel to us? Or Peter, John, and the other Apostles, who followed Christ in the flesh for 3 years? Who do we listen to?" That would cause incredible confusion and doubt amongst Jewish and Gentile Christians alike. It could seriously hinder the hard work for the gospel that Paul had been doing. So, Paul comes and sets forth his gospel to make sure that they all agree and are on the same page: that the gospel Paul preaches is the exact same gospel handed down by Christ to the Twelve.

And, thankfully, that's exactly what we see unfold. Skip down to verse 6: "And from those who seemed to be influential... *added nothing to me*" (Gal.2:6). In other words, Paul proclaimed his gospel message before the Apostles and church leaders in Jerusalem, and they agreed with it; that "added nothing" to the gospel message Paul proclaimed. They all believed and preached the same gospel. IN verses 7-8, we see that the Apostles even went on to affirm Paul's status and authority as an Apostle. They recognized that, just as Peter was a first-among-equals among the Apostles and led in their apostolic ministry to the Jews, so Paul was also an Apostle to the non-Jewish Gentile nations outside of Israel. In other words, the Apostles in Jerusalem recognized Paul as an Apostle, on an equal level of status and authority as them, only with a different sphere of ministry: Paul was commissioned as an Apostle to the Gentiles. They then extend to him the "right hand of fellowship" (v.9), which we'll come back to later.

So this is good news! Paul and the Apostles in Jerusalem all held to the one and same gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, Paul proves that the claims of his false teacher opponents were false, and the Galatians didn't have anything to worry about; the gospel Paul preached to them is true, trustworthy, and authoritative. IN fact, it's the only gospel. And this same thing is true for us today. This is important for us today because the Lord wants us to know that there was unanimous agreement on the truth of the gospel message among all the Apostles, even from the very beginning of the Early Church. Why? So that we can have absolute certainty and confidence in the truth of the gospel message and the authority of the New Testament Scriptures. Our New Testament is consistent; there aren't different gospels laid out by Paul, John, Peter, and James that contradict each other. No, they all teach the same gospel - for there is only one gospel. Indeed, the *whole Bible* consistently unfolds and points us to the one, true, gospel of Jesus Christ. There was absolute certainty on the gospel among the apostles and the early church; it is absolutely certain in the pages of Scripture. Therefore, we don't need to worry or have doubts. We can rest assured that the true gospel is plainly set forth for us in God's Word. And we can also take comfort in the fact that God has preserved the true gospel message, even over the last 2,000 years, so that all true Christians, throughout the ages in all the world, have always held to the exact same gospel message that we do, as revealed in Scripture.

And so, we have to ask: what exactly is this one true gospel message that the Bible teaches and Paul and the Apostles agreed on?

This leads us to point two...

II. Only the Law-Free Gospel of Christ Can Save us from Our Sin (Gal. 2:2b-5)

We know Paul's gospel message very clearly: that we are all sinners who are born enemies of God; we're all guilty and deserve God's wrath and eternal judgment in Hell, every single one of us; yet God had mercy, even on sinners and rebels like us, and sent Jesus Christ, God the Son, into the world to live a perfect life in our place, the perfectly righteous life that every single one of us has failed to live; He perfectly upheld God's moral Law and was perfectly sinless and righteous; yet He went to the Cross to die as a sacrifice, in the place of sinners, bearing God's wrath against sin that we deserve and shedding his blood to pay the penalty we owe; and that God accepted His sacrifice, raising Him from the grave on the third day, as Christ victoriously defeated Sin, Satan, and all of sin's consequences, even death; that Christ lived this perfect life, died on the cross, and rose again *in our place, for His people* - yet this is only true for those of us who *turn from everything else to Christ and put our faith in Him alone for salvation, believing that this good news is true and sufficient to save us!* This is the wonderful good news that we are saved from our sins *by grace along through faith alone in Christ alone!* We are saved purely by the grace of God - not by works of the Law of Moses! Not by any good works, so that we cannot boast, but all the glory of our salvation goes to God, since it's all His work, from beginning to end!

Paul sets this gospel before the apostles and elders in Jerusalem. But he doesn't just share the gospel message - he drives home the point with the test case of Titus. You see, Titus was not a Jew - he was a Gentile Christian. Therefore, he was not circumcised. But there were some who demanded that Titus be circumcised, that he become a good Jew and begin obeying the works of the Law of Moses, in order to be a Christian and be saved. But if that's true, that Titus needed to be circumcised in order to truly be a Christian, *then the gospel would be false!* This is why, in verse 4, Paul says that these "false brothers" who demanded that Titus be circumcised "slipped in to spy our our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery."

This idea of being "slaves to the Law" versus being "free in Christ" is a big theme in Galatians, and we'll continue to see this a lot in chapters 3 through 5. Being under the Law is slavery to sin, because the Law *condemns* - it shows us that we're sinners, that we *cannot* keep the Law, and that we deserve guilt and condemnation. To be under the demands of the Law means also to be under it's requirements and curses. - under it's condemnation. It shows us that

we are slaves to sin and stand *condemned under the righteous Law of God*. The whole point of the Law of Moses is that we cannot keep it and need grace; we need a savior to keep the Law for us and save us from our sins. But whereas the Law brings condemnation, the free gospel of Christ brings *freedom and salvation*. The gospel frees us from the Law's demands, because Jesus fulfilled the Law's demands in our place! If you're trusting in Christ this morning, you are declared righteous in Christ! . The gospel *saves us* from our sins, because Jesus *died in our place and satisfied God's wrath against our sins! If you're trusting in Christ, then you are no longer guilty or condemned, but you are forgiven!* Therefore, the gospel *clears our guilt and condemnation before the Lord*, so that we are truly declared *righteous* before GOD by grace through faith, completely apart from the Law or our own works.

If people need to believe in Jesus *plus be circumcised and obey the Law of Moses to be saved*, then the entire gospel is untrue! BEcause the true gospel is the message of free grace in Christ, apart from our own works, that we simply receive through faith - through trusting in Jesus alone for our salvation, believing that His life, death, and resurrection are sufficient to save us! Thankfully, however, this gospel is true! This is why, as verse 3 says, "But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

This is the only gospel, the only message, that can save us. If we try to return to the Law or believe that our works save us in any way, we are actually giving up freedom in Christ for the slavery of the Law and works-based righteousness. And that does not lead to salvation - it leads to Hell. If our salvation is dependent upon us in any way, then it's going to fail, because *every single one of us will fail*. INstead, we must rely solely upon the free grace of Christ. Daily, we must remind ourselves and each other: our salvation doesn't depend on any good works that you and I do; our standing before the Lord isn't based on the good you do or the bad you do. We are accepted and found pleasing to God *purely because of the grace of God in Christ Jesus!* If you're in Christ, then you have the freedom that grace brings! YOU are forgiven and righteous before the Lord, purely by grace through faith in Christ Jesus!

But, unfortunately, there will always be temptation to doubt this gospel, and there will always be those who challenge it and try to change it. Which leads us to point three...

III. There will be False Christians in the Church Who Oppose the Gospel (4-5)

When members of the Jerusalem church demand that Titus be circumcised, Paul calls them "false brothers." Now, "brother" is used here to show that these were professing Christians

and members of the church in Jerusalem. These were Jews who heard the gospel and professed faith in Christ. They were baptized; they were added to the numbers of the church in Jerusalem. They considered themselves Christians. Other Christians around them - even the elders of the church, even the apostles for a time - would have also considered them Christians. But Paul calls them “false brothers” in verse 4. They are “false brothers,” not Christians at all, who profess faith and joined the church, but really they “slipped in,” as though they were spies in disguise, claiming to be Christians but were really *in cognito*.

And this didn't just mean that these false Christians were in spiritual danger and on their way to Hell - it was also a danger and snare to others, as they tried to convince others to embrace legalism instead of the free grace of the gospel. So, in verse 5, Paul *resisted them* and “did not yield to them even for a moment.” And he says he did so :so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” That is, so that the Gentile believers would not be led astray into legalism, but would cling to the true gospel, so that they would be saved!

Just as these false brothers were found in the church of Jerusalem, and in the Galatian churches, so we are warned that there will be false Christians in our churches today as well. This could happen even at Bread of Life. There will be those who claim to be Christians and join our church, but are not truly believers. They might profess faith in Christ, but secretly they don't truly believe the right gospel of Christ, and deny the Word of God. There are many ways that someone could claim to be a Christian but not truly believe the only true gospel. And when they do so, they have a false hope for themselves, and they pose a serious danger to our church and other believers, since they could very easily lead others astray with them. Therefore, we must not be fooled, but must expect this to happen and be on the lookout for it. This is why it's so important that we constantly make sure we proclaim the gospel, to ourselves and each other, and never assume it. This is why we must guard our statement of faith and all teaching ministries in the church. This is why we have things like member classes and interviews, taking such great care in trying to make sure every member of the church truly understands and believes the gospel - because that's the only way we can be saved! And when someone proves to deny and challenge the gospel and does not repent, we must have the same approach as Paul: we must not yield for a moment, but must call them to repent and believe; and if they do not, then we must exercise church discipline, out of a love for that false brother, hoping they will turn and believe, and out of love for our fellow church members, so that no one will be led astray. We must guard the

gospel and guard each other in our church, for we labor to the end that everyone here will truly believe in the good news of Christ and be saved!

And we don't just labor alone, but share this labor for the gospel with all true Christians and churches. Therefore, it's important that we...

IV. We Must Support Fellow Christians and Churches in the Work of the Gospel (Gal. 2:9-10)

We see this in two ways in the text. First, we see the Jerusalem church leaders *affirming and supporting* Paul and Barnabas's ministry to the Gentiles. We read in verse 9: "And 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." Seeing that both different groups believed and preached the *same gospel of Christ*, despite some differences of what their contexts and churches looked like (one all Jewish, the other mixed with Gentiles), they affirmed each other's ministries and churches as preaching the same gospel and laboring in the same work: to see the gospel go forth, that many people, from all nations, would repent, believe, and be saved! They were working together in the same gospel ministry, fulfilling Christ's command to make disciples of all nations together, just in different contexts and places.

And secondly, we see this idea continued into v.9: "Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do." Now, this verse is a little harder. It seems a little out of place and irrelevant at first, doesn't it? So we have to ask: how does this fit in to the rest of the paragraph? And I think it makes sense when we realize that "the poor" here is most likely a reference to the poor, needy Christians in Judea. After all, the context for Paul's visit was to bring a financial contribution to the churches in Judea, since a famine was coming, and these Jewish Christians were already struggling economically and undergoing persecution for their work of the gospel in Israel. Therefore, I think they're asking Paul and the Gentile churches to *continue* to support the Judean Christians and churches, supporting one another as they labor in the same gospel ministry, just in different areas and with different challenges. And, indeed, the rest of the book of Acts shows us that this is exactly what Paul continued to do; he led the Gentile church plants to take up a contribution and send money to continue to help out the Jerusalem church later on, as they suffered persecution and difficulties.

So I think this applies to us today as a reminder that we, too, are called to support fellow Christians and churches, partnering with them in the work of the gospel. But, that's not at all - this passage reminds us that it is *crucial* that we only support and partner those who hold to the *same Christian gospel - the only gospel! - that we do!* We must partner with and support fellow churches who rightly believe the fundamental truths of Scripture, without which there is no gospel - believing the same God, that the Bible is His Word, that everyone's a sinner deserving Hell, that only those who repent and believe in Christ will be saved, that Jesus is God the Son, fully God and fully Man, that He is our Lord and we're called to obey Him, and so forth. It's crucial that we only partner with and support churches and Christian ministries that we're confident truly believe and preach the only true gospel of Jesus Christ and cling steadfastly to His Word.

And so, this is why we partner with like-minded churches through cooperating with the SBC, supporting one another financially and in prayer as we support missionaries and churches around the country and the world! This is why we partner with local gospel-preaching churches, through the Adirondack Baptist Association. This is why we prayed for them earlier, and why we partner together to make disciples and plant churches throughout the North Country. And this is why we regularly, corporately pray for other faithful, gospel-preaching churches that we know.

We labor in the gospel together because we truly believe the Bible, just as we see in the passage, that the good news of Christ's life, death, and resurrection in the place of ruined sinners is the *only* message that can save us from our sins and lead to eternal life with God! Therefore, let us steadfastly believe the only true gospel of Christ; let us guard the gospel in our church, and work together to proclaim it faithfully to ourselves, to each other, and to those all around us who do not know Christ.

And so, if you don't know Christ this morning and are not truly trusting in Christ for your salvation, I plead with you to turn and trust in Him alone, and then make this public by professing your faith through baptism and joining a gospel-preaching church. If any of you have any questions about believing the gospel, or baptism, or church membership, I would love to speak with you. Let us pray.