

The Straightforward Gospel
Galatians 2
Growing a Culture
of Grace Series (#3)

Introduction:

To grow anything successfully, you need several things in your gardener's toolkit. Here in South Texas, for instance, knowing what plants can survive and thrive in this soil and climate is important.

When we moved to San Antonio after living in northwest Indiana for over a decade, we remembered having had successful annual vegetable crops from our backyard garden. So why not do that here in south Texas, too?

You already know where this is going, don't you? We were agricultural failures with our first, and last, south Texas vegetable garden due to a lack of knowledge.

We want to grow and maintain a culture of grace at Northwest. To do that successfully, there are spiritual truths we need to understand and apply to our lives so that as Paul says at the conclusion of our text for today, we might **"...not set aside the grace of God."** [Galatians 2:21a]

Pray

Today's message is the third message in the series *Growing a Culture of Grace*. Together we have seen two markers of a culture of grace. The first was **Be Loyal to Jesus' Gospel**. Our text today will underscore that marker as well.

The second marker of a culture of grace we saw last week: **Tell & Listen to Personal Stories About the Life-Changing Power of Jesus** with the purpose being so our Father in Heaven is glorified.

Today, we see how a culture of grace can provide an environment in which unity and diversity in ministry along with the willingness to provide loving correction can honor our Lord by upholding the truth of the Gospel.

Paul's letter to these churches gives us an eyewitness perspective of how the early church made the transition¹ from the Old Covenant² to the New Covenant announced by Jesus at the Last Supper and initiated by Him when He died on the cross and rose again.

Prior to Christ's death on the cross and His resurrection, the Mosaic Law operated in a certain way between God and mankind, specifically Israel. Here are at least three things about the Mosaic Law starting with what it was **NOT**:

1. It was NOT a way of meriting an eternal relationship with God. Eternal life was, and is, a gift from God to those who by faith receive His gift of life through the Messiah, Jesus Christ.
2. It WAS for Israel so as to distinguish them as God's chosen people;
3. It WAS the temporary means God provided Israel for having fellowship with Him which one day would be made obsolete by the New Covenant.³

With the initiation of the New Covenant, the Old Covenant – which is the Mosaic Law – was replaced forever by grace ministered by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit to each believer as the means of fellowship with God.

Grace had always been how an eternal relationship with God, received as a gift, was possible. Now, under the New Covenant, grace also is God's provision for all believers to have fellowship with Him.

However, you can imagine with the first church being almost entirely Jewish in ethnicity and culture, not much thought was given to how the Law fit in with this totally new way of thinking of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

¹ See the APPENDIX at the end for additional historical notes related to the transitional nature of the early church and the context of this chapter.

² More precisely the Mosaic Covenant – what Paul refers to as the Law

³ Jeremiah 31:31-34 cf Hebrews 8:7-13

Unfortunately, this led to a wrong view of the Law by some in the Jerusalem church and, as we will see, it began to creep into Gentile churches, too, while seeking to discredit Paul's ministry to the Gentiles.

So, that brings us to Paul's letter to the Galatian churches.

In the first chapter, the Apostle Paul began sharing the story of his life before he met Jesus Christ on the road to Damascus.

He then shared about his life after he placed his faith alone in Christ alone with the result being the believers in Judea ... **were hearing only, "He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy." And they glorified God in me.** [Galatians 1:23-24]

He continues his story in Chapter 2 with a word to mark the passage of time . . .

[Galatians 2:1a] **Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem...**

From the time Paul, as a believer, had been in Jerusalem in chapter 1 and now here, fourteen years had passed. During that time:

- Barnabas was sent by the Jerusalem church to Syrian Antioch to minister to the church there that consisted of both Jewish and Gentile believers.
- Realizing he needed someone to partner with him, Barnabas went to Tarsus and recruited Paul to join him.⁴
- About a year later, Agabus, a prophet from Jerusalem, visited Antioch and prophesied about a great famine. The believers at Antioch responded with a financial gift to be delivered by Barnabas and Paul to the believers in Jerusalem.⁵
- One other historical note, not about Paul, but about the Apostle Peter which underscores the transitional nature of the

church and relates to what Paul writes later in this chapter. The events in this chapter occur **AFTER** Peter's encounter with Cornelius in Acts 10 as well as Peter's defense of that encounter in Acts 11.⁶ Peter discovered through divine revelation that the Mosaic Law's distinction between Jew and Gentile was now obsolete. Peter was fully aware of, and defended, this truth of the New Covenant.

Back to Chapter 2 . . . When Paul went to Jerusalem this time, he did not go alone. He went . . .

[Galatians 2:1b]

...with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.

Nothing surprising about Barnabas being with Paul. But why bring Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile believer? The reason would soon become obvious.

[Galatians 2:2-5]

2 And I went up by revelation and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 And this occurred because of false brethren⁷ secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

The revelation to which Paul refers was likely Agabus' prophecy of a coming famine. The Antioch church's response was to receive

⁶ Acts 11:1-18

⁷ From Dave Smith: "Paul refers to them as "false brethren" implying either that they were brethren who, now were being false, or that they were not brethren at all." Of interest, the Apostle Paul is the only NT writer who uses this term, using it twice – here and in 2 Corinthians 11:26. I agree with Dave on its use in this passage. Quote is from Dave's 2018 Message on this same passage.

⁴ Acts 11:19-30

⁵ Acts 11:27-30

donations to be delivered by Barnabas and Paul, to Jerusalem, as a relief gift.

While in Jerusalem, Paul took advantage of this opportunity to meet privately with the “pillars” of the Jerusalem church, Peter, John and James – the half-brother of Christ. The meeting was to verify all of them are on the same page regarding the New Covenant and that the teaching of the false brethren was just that, false!

Paul, I think had two things in mind. One to verify these false brethren did not represent the thinking of the “pillars” of the church. It did not! The second was to update them on what was happening in Antioch.

Paul describes his relationship to them in the next five verses.

Galatians 2:6-10

6 But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter 8 (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

How this is translated in our English Bibles might lead us to think Paul did not think too highly of these men. But my understanding of what he has written, it reflects Paul’s mutual respect for these men.

Remember, Paul is reminding his readers in the Galatian churches of his own apostolic authority. This is a relational description establishing that he and these men, as apostles, are equals.⁸

So back to the reason for bringing Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile believer. The problem facing the Jerusalem church and which Paul says false brethren brought to Antioch is often referred to as the Judaizer problem or legalism. Paul describes it as exchanging liberty for bondage.

The Judaizers insisted Gentile believers like Titus, needed to observe the Mosaic Law and for Gentile men that meant circumcision.⁹ This insistence by the Judaizers could take one of two forms.

One was that to receive eternal life, you had to be obedient to the Mosaic Law. The other was that as a believer, to enjoy God’s blessings, to have fellowship with God, you must observe the Mosaic law.

Paul brought Titus to Jerusalem to these three leaders in this private meeting to verify there was agreement with the understanding of the New Covenant that obedience to the Mosaic Law was never needed for eternal life and now it is not needed for fellowship with God.

His concern about running in vain was whether or not there was unity on the truth of the Gospel between Jerusalem and Antioch, whether there were two Gospels – one for the Jew that includes the law and one for the Gentile that doesn’t. Or is there one Gospel only?

Is there one church or two – one for the Jews and one for the Gentiles? Or is there one church only?

⁸ **The Expositor’s Bible Commentary**. Volume 10. Pgs. 442-443. This commentator suggests Paul’s feelings of frustration with how these men handled the problem of the “false brethren” facing the Jerusalem and Antioch churches and now was affecting the Galatian churches perhaps demonstrated a lack of leadership.

⁹ The nature of the New Covenant did not necessitate that the Jews abandon circumcision any more than it required the Gentiles to adopt it. What the Judaizers were stating was that to be in a right relationship with God and/or to have fellowship with God, circumcision was a necessity – as well as other aspects of the Mosaic Law.

How wonderful to read that at the end of this private meeting, there was complete unity on the gospel message yet also a recognition of diverse spheres of ministry plus they all agreed on caring for the poor as an outworking of the Gospel message.¹⁰ This unity and agreement was symbolized by the extending of “the right hand of fellowship” sealing a compact of mutual friendship, respect, and endeavor.

Confronting issues within the church – in this instance, affirming the gospel message – requires respectful, loving interaction.

Realizing and accepting that the Head of the Church, Jesus Christ, through the work of the Holy Spirit, He has gifted every believer for the work of the ministry. Those gifts, just like each believer, are diverse and often complement a believer’s natural gifts and abilities.

Within that diversity there can be unity of purpose as we live according to the truth of the gospel. Being straightforward with the Gospel requires not adding to or taking away from Jesus’ own words, “...he who believes in Me has everlasting life.” (John 6:47). That message forms the foundation for everything else we do.

What I take away from these first ten verses is what I consider a third marker of a culture of grace: **A culture of grace provides the environment in which unity & diversity work together to affirm the truth of the Gospel.**

But what happened next in Antioch contradicted the unity enjoyed in Jerusalem. We don’t know how long after the visit to Jerusalem the following events occurred, but the key thing to remember is it occurs AFTER that visit where they all agreed the Mosaic Law no longer was in force as a requirement for fellowship with God.

Galatians 2:11-13

11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face, because he was to be blamed; 12 for before certain men came

¹⁰ In context, the “poor” in view here were fellow Christians who, due to persecution, needed aid. However, caring for the poor and needy is a Christian virtue. Ephesians 4:28; 1 Timothy 6:18; James 2:15-16

from James, he would eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the circumcision. 13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

The church at Antioch consisted of both Gentile and Jewish believers. The Jewish believers have been learning how the New Covenant, in contrast to the Old Covenant, provides liberty regarding fellowship with their heavenly Father and with Gentile believers. They are learning together the truth that:

Galatians 3:28

***There is neither Jew nor Greek...
for you are all one in Christ Jesus.***

When Peter came to visit the believers in Antioch, his convictions about the New Covenant were about to be put to the test.

He believes Gentiles who trust in Christ are fully accepted in God's sight under the New Covenant. So, while the traditional and Old Covenant approach to Jewish law would never allow a Jew to eat with a Gentile, Peter does so while in Antioch—for a while.

However, when some followers of Jesus' half-brother James show up, men who still disapprove of Jewish Christians eating with Gentile Christians, Peter gets scared, spooked, something concerns him.

Peter thinks, “This looks bad!” So, he leaves the table. Because of his influence, all the other Antioch Jewish Christians leave the table, too. Even Barnabas, Paul's partner in ministry, can't take the pressure.¹¹

Paul labels this as hypocrisy.¹²

¹¹ Some commentators suggest that the meal being shared was a communion meal, remembering the Lord’s death until He comes again. If so, that makes Peter’s hypocrisy especially grievous.

¹² Peter tended to compromise his convictions when he was under pressure (cf. Matt. 16:16-23; 26:69-75; Mark 14:66-72; Luke 22:54-62; John 18:15-18, 25-27).

Despite having received divine revelation regarding the implications of the New Covenant related to Gentiles and despite having recently affirmed this understanding during Paul's Jerusalem visit, his actions here ran contrary to his belief, in effect, making the Gentile believers "second-class" Christians!

By his actions, Peter cast doubt on the truth that God accepts Jews and Gentiles equally, thus playing into the hands of the Judaizers. In addition, he was insulting his Gentile brethren and acting contrary to his own convictions.¹³

How might this apply to us in 2023? To quote Pastor Dave, "Hypocrisy - the kind that Peter practiced - is alive and well when we erect barriers that separate us from those who believe in Jesus yet are different from us in worldview or culture. Because, if we erect barriers that hold those at arm's length who are different from us, culturally, we are sinning against the Gospel. But when we affirm the worth and importance of EVERY member of the body of Christ, that's powerful. That's maturity. That's love."¹⁴

How did Paul respond to Peter's and Barnabas' hypocrisy? Verse 14 – Galatians 2:14

14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

Notice what is at stake here as Paul opposes Peter right to his face because of Peter's hypocrisy. "...***they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel...***" Nothing less than the Gospel – the New Covenant – itself is at stake!

The Gospel message now is not only that we can have an eternal relationship with the Triune God because of His grace, but we can have fellowship with Him, His Son, and His Holy Spirit through His grace as well. This is possible because of what Jesus did on the cross, providing access to the very throne of God, the Father, and because of the Holy Spirit Who now indwells every believer.

Paul accuses Peter of conduct contrary to his professed convictions and completely contrary to the underpinnings of the Gospel message of justification by faith.

Galatians 2:15-16

15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16 knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Paul will address two related ideas as he helps the Galatian church see how Peter's hypocrisy causes great confusion regarding the gift of eternal life as well as how Christians were to fellowship with God.

First, he states that justification has always been by faith. That was true for every Jew who ever received the gift of eternal life. It has always been by faith alone in the promise of the Messiah alone because of the grace of God. Abraham before the Law and King David after the Law were both were justified by faith alone.¹⁵

Paul, speaking directly to Peter, in my "loose Laughlin paraphrase" says, "Peter, we Jews, we know the works of the Law, the Law that was specific to we the Jews, that Law justifies no person. The Gentiles, whom we have referred to as sinners, they are justified the same way

NOTES ON GALATIANS 2023 EDITION, Dr. Thomas L. Constable, pg. 41 of PDF version; found online at soniclight.com

¹³ Ibid. pg. 42

¹⁴ Quote is from Dave's 2018 Message on this same passage.

¹⁵ See Romans 4

because all people, Jew or Gentile, can only be justified by faith alone in Christ alone.”

And what is this justification? Justification in relation to eternal life is a legal term and means being declared righteous once and for all by God the Father based on the Lord Jesus Christ’s finished work on the cross. When a person by faith believes in Christ for the forgiveness of sin, at that moment, God declares that person justified or righteous.

In Paul’s second letter to the Corinthian believers, he wrote,

2 Corinthians 5:21

For He (God) made Him (Christ) Who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

Jesus died on the cross on behalf of a broken world so God’s creation could have, as a gift received by faith, both a relationship and fellowship with His Father.

Paul continues his reasoning about justification in verses 17-19.

Galatians 2:17-19

17 But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not! 18 For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

Here, Paul’s argument shifts, I believe, from the idea of receiving eternal life by faith to living life as a believer under the New Covenant, living by grace, and enjoying fellowship with the Father.¹⁶

Paul is probably responding to one of the Judaizers’ accusations that such a belief leads to lawlessness which Christ promotes. Paul quickly responded to that notion using one of the strongest phrases in the Greek language to communicate the absurdity of such a conclusion.

¹⁶ This marks a transition in the letter as the remaining chapters focus on the spiritual of the believer.

Instead, he turns the argument of the Judaizers around on them and states that under the New Covenant, if he, Paul, were to return to the Law as his way of life – ***to build again those things which I destroyed*** - then at that point he would indeed be a sinner for violating God’s purposes now.

In fact, Paul died to the Law as a way of life so he could in fact live life God’s way now which he describes in verse 20.

Galatians 2:20

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

Perhaps you have memorized verse 20 before. It is one of those great statements of life in Christ.

In the context of this chapter, Paul concludes his affirmation and superiority of the New Covenant by sharing this truth about the life God now has for us to live.

What Paul describes is how the believer is now in Christ and Christ in the believer. By faith, in response to Jesus’ love and His sacrifice, the believer’s life can reflect Christ’s life.¹⁷

Finally, Paul writes . . .

Galatians 2:21

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

In concluding this part of his letter to the churches in Galatia, he wants to be clear what happens when our actions contradict what we believe. In writing what he does about not setting aside the grace of God, he is implying that Peter did just that. When Peter stopped eating meals with his Gentile brothers and sisters in Christ in Antioch, he was setting aside grace as the operating principle of the New Covenant. Such an action implies Christ death means nothing!

¹⁷ Paul develops this theme even more in Romans 6-8.

When we make things that are of no eternal importance more important than showing the love of Christ and the grace of God to others, wherever we might interact with others, we become like Peter and set aside the grace of God.

Paul was determined to uphold the truth of the Gospel. So, he exalts two things in this chapter: Justification is by faith alone in Christ alone by God's grace. The other is this: Living by faith through the power of the new life within you provides the means to have fellowship with your Heavenly Father.

From this, it seems to me that to develop a culture of grace there should be **a willingness to provide loving correction guided by truth and grace.**

So, two more things that can mark us as knowing what it takes to grow a culture of grace are **providing the environment in which unity and diversity work together to affirm the truth of the gospel and a willingness to provide loving correction guided by truth and grace.**

In a few moments, Jack Biros will lead us in observing the Lord's Supper – Communion. This time offers us the opportunity to reflect on Christ's sacrifice as well considering ways you are allowing Christ to live through you to encourage the unity of our church, to rejoice in the diversity of each individual and her or his spiritual gifts – differences that can make the tapestry of our fellowship so rich.

PRAYER

COMMUNION

APPENDIX

To better understand Paul's heart and attitude as he writes this portion of his letter to the churches in Galatia, take a moment to review and think about church history at that point in time.

- The church began on the Day of Pentecost, 50 days after our Lord's resurrection, and consisted almost exclusively of those who had been living under the Law of Moses.
- These believers, the church in Jerusalem, were led by the Apostles and the church grew quickly with guidance and doctrine coming directly from those men.¹⁸
- The only Scripture available at that time was the Old Testament. Jesus' teachings were the doctrines taught by the Apostles and others. They would soon record these teachings and additional revelations along with exhortations and applications as the Holy Spirit guided.¹⁹
- But until those were written, the only written Scriptures available to the church at that point was what we call the Old Testament, often referred to in the New Testament as the Law and the Prophets.²⁰
- The New Covenant, prophesied by Jeremiah²¹, was initiated by Jesus at His death on the cross and resurrection. But the implications of the New Covenant, how it made the Mosaic Covenant obsolete and provided a new way for believers to have fellowship with their heavenly Father were yet to be fully understood. Many believers at the first church in Jerusalem probably thought this was "Judaism 2.0" and not too much regarding observance of the Mosaic Law would change. It was still very much a culture of law rather than grace.

¹⁸ Acts 2:42

¹⁹ 2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Peter 1:19-21; 3:15-16 (equating Paul's writings to other Scriptures) Also see John 14:26

²⁰ Luke 24:27; Acts 24:14; 28:23; Romans 3:21

²¹ Jeremiah 31:31-34

- Luke's historical account of the early church, the book of Acts, provides us with many of the transitional details as the apostles and the church realized that the New Covenant was a culture of grace NOT law.
- Other historical notes related to the visit to Jerusalem by Paul, Barnabas & Titus referenced in Chapter 2.
 - This visit to Jerusalem occurs prior to Barnabas and Paul's First Missionary trip as well as the Jerusalem Council.²² The early church is beginning to realize the uniqueness of the church as it relates to the New Covenant.
 - Another historical factor – James - John's brother – has recently been executed by Herod. (Acts 12:1-2) Persecution of the believers has grown and is worsening. Ironically, Paul helped to get that persecution started prior to his conversion and NOW he is delivering relief aid to the believers in Jerusalem whom he once would have imprisoned or executed.
- Historical Notes Regarding Galatians
 - This letter to the Galatian churches is most likely the first letter Paul wrote. It was inspired by God and guided by God's Holy Spirit and was included in the final collection of books we call the New Testament.
 - Paul wrote to the Galatians after his first missionary journey which included evangelism and discipleship in the Galatian region. Yet it seems Paul wrote to the believers there before the Jerusalem Council we read about in Acts 15. Why? There is no mention of the Council mentioned nor of the council's action which would have provided additional support for Paul's correction of Peter and exhortations to the Galatian believers.²³

²² Even though it addresses the same issue, but it is a much greater and more public gathering while this meeting was in private between 3 of the leading apostles – Peter, James (not John's brother) & John and Paul & Barnabas.

²³ **NOTES ON GALATIANS 2023 EDITION**, Dr. Thomas L. Constable, pg. 4 of PDF version; found online at soniclight.com