

“Only One Gospel”
Galatians 2:6-10

Introduction:

1. Good morning! Today we return to listen to the word of the Lord as written in the letter to the Galatians. In this letter Paul is defending the truth of the gospel (good news) of Christ from the attacks of those who were twisting the message into a message about religion with its rules and regulations. True Christianity is God’s message about a living relationship with him through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.
2. It seems that one of the attacks of the message twisters, or false brothers (2:4) was on Paul’s position as an apostle (sent one) of Jesus Christ. They seem to have said to the Galatians something like this: “The message Paul told you was okay, as far as it went. But if you really want to be part of the people of God and know and worship God properly, then you must be circumcised and keep the ceremonies of the law covenant. Paul doesn’t know as much as the original apostles, who by the way teach the full message that we teach.” So Paul must defend his independent position as an apostle of Christ and the message that he proclaims as Christ’s apostle.
3. In the first five verses of this chapter, Paul starts to tell of a meeting that he had fourteen years after his conversion. He makes the point that the leaders of the Jerusalem church saw no deficiency in what Paul preached, and that Titus, a Gentile convert, was not compelled to be circumcised. Let us now listen to what else he tells us about that meeting.

Exposition:

1. They saw no deficiency in Paul’s message (2:6)
 - a. The opening words of verse six could be misconstrued to give the impression that Paul was arrogant and looked down on the leaders of the Jerusalem church. That idea is very unlikely, because in this section he points out their unity and agreement. Instead, he probably borrows some words of the false brothers, by which they tried to downplay Paul’s position. “Listen to those who are important! They knew Jesus when he walked among people.” Paul answers that distinctions in the flesh mean nothing. God does not receive people by external distinctions. All had their apostolic commission directly from Jesus Christ.

b. Paul says that they “added nothing to me”. Paul lacked nothing in his apostolic calling or his gospel message. He needed nothing. He received the complete gospel from Christ, and so he preached it.

2. They recognized Paul’s gospel ministry (2:7-8).

1. They saw or perceived that Paul was preaching the same gospel that they were. He preached the good news to the Gentile people groups, just as Peter preached it to the Jewish people group. By these words Paul reinforces his previous point (1:6-9) that there is only one gospel, regardless who the audience is. Paul preached the gospel to the Gentiles; Peter preached it to the Jews. But it was the same gospel. There is only one gospel, regardless of ethnic background and skin color, religious heritage or political leanings, social standing or education. We preach the same good news to all people everywhere at all times.

2. They perceived that God was at work through Peter’s ministry and through Paul’s. God used both men to reach people with the message of salvation. A similar point is made in 1 Cor 3:5-7. Notice the supernatural aspect of true Christianity. People do not become followers of Jesus Christ because of the abilities of those preaching him. Instead, God is at work in true conversions. Now at this point, we should celebrate the greatness of our God. He reaches down to people dead in sin and makes us alive in Jesus Christ! Resurrection power is operating in the salvation of every sinner. If you are following Christ today, it is because of what God the Holy Spirit did in you one day. Practically speaking, this means that we must seek the blessing of the Spirit on God on our ministry. Unless the Spirit gives new birth, nothing happens.

Apply: As we start this year, let each of us be praying for five people that the Lord will reach through us. Who is on your list?

3. They accepted Paul as a fellow worker (2:9).

a. The foundation of their acceptance was their recognition of the grace of apostleship that Paul possessed (cf. Rm 1:5; 12:3; 15:15-16; 1 Cor 3:10; Eph 3:8). The point is that the other apostles saw what the false brothers strenuously denied—that Paul was an apostle. We should see that this leads far away from an institutional concept of the church. The church is an assembly of grace, a gathering of men, women, girls and boys in whom God lives and acts. When we speak of joining a church, some have the wrong idea of becoming part of an institution or organization. Instead, when we join we recognize the grace of God active in each other. We

want to accept one another as fellow heirs of God's promises in Christ. We rejoice in being partners in the good news of Jesus.

Point: If you have received God's grace in Christ, and you see that same grace in others in this gathering, then you ought to join with us!

b. They gave a visible sign of their acceptance—the right hand of partnership. They knew that they wanted to work with him and welcomed him as an equal. When someone joins our assembly, we continue this practice. We want you to know that you are very welcome!

4. They had one request (2:10). Again we see that Paul was not omitting any details, but was telling the whole story.

a. “By $\mu\omicron\nu\nu\omicron\nu$ Paul implies that the ‘pillars’ imposed no conditions, made no stipulations, apart from the request for Christian aid (which could in no way be construed as an ‘addition’ to Paul’s gospel).” [Bruce]

b. Paul was already engaged in charitable activity, because that was the purpose of this visit to Jerusalem (see Ac 11). When we become followers of Christ, his compassion for people ignites compassion in us for the needs of people. We want to see them become fully committed followers of Christ, and we want to lessen their misery in their journey through this ruined world.

Comment: Here we must think clearly, since many in our day are not. There is too much talk about giving to the needy as being part of the gospel message. But Paul has already said that the others “added nothing” to him and his message, which would include giving to the poor. The gospel is the message that we can be right with God through faith in Christ who died and rose again. Giving to the needy flows from love, which is a result of being right with God.

Lessons:

1. We should not judge gospel ministers by external appearance (2:6).

a. People are very influenced by what leaders are said to be, such as the number of degrees after their name, the number of influential people who like them, their wealth, etc.

b. But God does not accept people on the basis of what they are in this world, and neither should we. What matters is whether or not someone is in union with the risen Christ and our faithfulness to the gospel. Do we see something of Jesus in them?

Illustration: Last week we went to Parkside Church in Chagrin Falls, Ohio on a very snowy morning. They have three morning services, attended by about 7,000 people. After their second service, I had the privilege of meeting the pastor, Alistair Begg. Believe it or not, he was just an ordinary looking guy—no halo or other supernatural aura about him. But he preached Christ faithfully!

2. We should see the fallacy of arguments that exalt Peter above the other apostles (2:7, 9).
 - a. James is mentioned first, not Peter.
 - b. James, Peter and John accepted Paul and Barnabas as equals.
 - c. Peter's ministry was to the Jews, not to the Gentiles, and so not to Rome. Who started the church at Rome is not spoken of in the Bible and hidden in history.

Comment: We must evaluate all arguments about the church according to the scriptures and not the traditions of people.

3. We should accept one another and work together to advance the gospel (2:9).
 - a. If the gospel is sufficient to justify ungodly sinners (and it is, Rm 4:5), then we must be prepared to accept ungodly sinners when God justifies them through faith in Christ. Paul was no longer an outcast; he was a partner in the gospel.
 - b. As we accept one another, we will bring praise to God (Rm 15:5-7).
4. We should praise God for his gracious work in the gospel (2:8). The living God is the one who saves people, and we should honor him as the Savior. The question we would ask is this: Has the Lord saved you? Do you know him?