

Paul's Calling and Training (Part 2)

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[0 : 00] In the verses we covered last week, which were Galatians chapter 1 verses 11 through 24, Paul summarized how God and Jesus revealed the gospel to Paul and transformed Paul's life for the glory of God. Paul emphasized that he received the gospel directly from the Godhead rather than from any person. As we begin chapter 2 of Galatians tonight, Paul still is summarizing his calling and training. He's responding to the Judaizers' claim that he failed to qualify as a legitimate apostle. And in the opening verses of chapter 2, Paul shows that his version of the gospel agrees with what the other apostles teach. Despite the lack of early collaboration, that agreement is possible because all the apostles' teaching came from God. Let's read tonight's passage. So tonight we'll look at Galatians chapter 2 verses 1 through 10. In those verses, Paul wrote,

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up because of a revelation and set before them, though privately before those who seemed influential, the gospel that I proclaimed among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus so that they may bring us into slavery, to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And 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. On 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, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised also worked through me for mine to the Gentiles. 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. Only they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. One of the ways some false teachers of Paul's day tried to undermine his authority was to hint that his gospel was different from Peter's and from the views of the other apostles in Jerusalem. They said that the church was being saddled with two gospels, Paul's and Peter's, and that each claimed a divine origin. Surely they went on, we cannot follow Paul if he is in a minority, and if Peter and the rest of the apostles disagree with him, then we can't follow him either.

And that was evidently one of the arguments of the Judaizers. They were trying to disrupt the unity of the apostolic circle. They were openly alleging that the apostles contradicted one another.

[3 : 34] Rather than let the allegations by the Judaizers fester unaddressed, Paul met with the other apostles when he went to Jerusalem. And in this passage tonight, we will see the other apostles endorse Paul in his gospel while charging him to preach the gospel to the Gentiles and to remember the poor.

That's the main idea for this text. The other apostles endorse Paul in his gospel while charging him to teach the gospel to the Gentiles and to remember the poor. We'll break tonight's text into three sections, starting with verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2. And in those verses, we learn about Paul's trip. So Paul's trip is the first thing that we'll cover. Here are Galatians 2, 1 and 2 again. Then after 14 years, I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.

I 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 that I was not running or had not run in vain. Several commentaries spend a lot of effort attempting to establish the exact date of this visit. We'll touch on the two main timing questions, but then we'll quickly get into the more important things about the passage. The first timing question concerns what Paul

meant when he says after 14 years. Some people think he meant 14 years after his conversion experience. Other people think he meant 14 years after the events of chapter 1, which would be 17 years after his conversion experience, because we know that he spent three years in the desert. It seems like from the reading of the text that 17 would be the most likely, since he just mentions the three years at the end of chapter 1, and then we go directly into chapter 2. But regardless, it doesn't really matter that much. You're only talking about a difference of three years. The second timing question concerns whether the events recorded here took place at the Jerusalem Council, and that council is documented in Acts 15. A majority of the scholars think that this episode did coincide with the Jerusalem Council, but others think that Paul is referring to a more private meeting that occurred before the Council, and this view seems more likely.

If you look at Acts 15, there are similarities between what Galatians 2 describes and what happens in Acts 15, but there are also significant differences. If Paul were writing this letter after the Jerusalem Council, then he certainly would have mentioned the decision of the church leaders in Jerusalem, because their decision at the Jerusalem Council decisively denounced the Judaizers.

[6 : 45] But regardless of your view on the timing of this encounter, the most important thing is the actual substance of what happened here in Galatians. Although the timing is debatable, the text leaves little doubt about the actual substance, so let's go ahead and dig into the substance now.

Verse 1 tells us that Paul took Barnabas and Titus with him on this trip. We've talked some about Barnabas in other studies. Remember that when Paul visited Jerusalem the first time and met with Peter and James, Barnabas had to make the introduction because the other apostles doubted that Paul was a true believer. We also know that Barnabas was a nickname. Acts 4.36 tells us that Barnabas' real name was Joseph. The apostles nicknamed Joseph Barnabas because Barnabas means son of encouragement.

So if the apostles give you a nickname, that's a pretty good one to get. And almost every time we see Barnabas mentioned in Scripture, he's living up to that nickname. From the earliest days of the church, Barnabas was associated with Gentile believers. When the gospel came to the Gentiles in Antioch, Barnabas was sent to encourage them in their faith. Barnabas also was the one who enlisted Paul to help minister at the church in Antioch. Barnabas and Paul worked together in teaching and in helping the poor.

Barnabas accompanied Paul on his first missionary trip that you can read about in Acts chapter 13 and all the way through Acts 14. Barnabas also had seen God's blessings on the gospel that they preached.

And we know that Barnabas encouraged young John Mark after he dropped out of the ministry temporarily. Titus was a Gentile believer who worked with Paul and apparently was one to Christ through Paul's ministry. Titus was a product of Paul's ministry among the Gentiles then, and he was taken to Jerusalem here as sort of exhibit A from the Gentile churches. In later years, Titus assisted Paul by going to some of the most difficult churches to help them resolve their problems. Titus chapter 1 verse 4 is the main reason we can be confident that Titus was converted under Paul's ministry. In his letter to Titus, Paul wrote these words in verse 4 of chapter 1. He said, to Titus, my true child in the common faith, grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus, our Savior. So look now at Galatians 2.2 again. That verse tells us why Paul, Barnabas, and Titus went to Jerusalem. Paul wrote there,

[9 : 39] So God revealed to Paul that he should go to Jerusalem. And Paul took that opportunity to present to the Jerusalem leaders what he had been teaching to the Gentiles for more than a decade.

Paul showed us in chapter 1 that his gospel came from God, not man. And now he shows in the first part of chapter 2 that his gospel was precisely the same as that of the other apostles. To prove that his gospel was independent of the other apostles, he stressed that he paid only one previous visit to Jerusalem.

And we know from chapter 1 that that previous visit lasted only 15 days. But now here in chapter 2, to prove that his gospel was identical with the other apostles, Paul now stresses that when he paid a proper visit to Jerusalem, his gospel was endorsed and approved by the other apostles.

The apostles with whom Paul met were Peter, James, and John. And that's Jesus' half-brother when we talk about James.

Peter, we know from his prominent part in the gospels and in the first half of the book of Acts. Peter was involved in opening the door of faith to the Jews, the Samaritans, and some people also forget

that he was involved in opening the gospel to the Gentiles first in Acts chapter 10.

[11 : 22] John, we also know from the gospel records as one of Christ's inner circle. He was associated with Peter in the ministry of the Word. And we'll spend a little bit more time on James.

The gospel record indicates that Mary and Joseph had other children, and James was among them. Of course, Jesus was born by the power of the Spirit and not through natural means.

So Jesus' half-brothers and sisters were the other children that Mary and Joseph had. And those half-brothers and sisters failed to believe in Jesus during his early ministry.

Yet we find his brethren associated with the believers in the early church. And Paul informs us that the risen Christ appeared to James, and that was the turning point in James' life.

You can read about that in 1 Corinthians 15. So James, by this time, was the leader of the early church in Jerusalem. And he also wrote the Epistle of James.

[12 : 26] That letter, plus Acts 21.18, would suggest that he was very Jewish in his thinking. If James agreed that following Jewish laws and customs was unnecessary for Gentile believers, that would be a major endorsement for Paul.

And let's consider why Paul wanted the endorsement of the big three, as we'll call them, in Jerusalem. Paul already knew that he was correct, but he wanted to be sure that the other apostles and he were still working in harmony, that they all were going in the same direction.

The Judaizers' false teachers were claiming that they were working under the authority of James, Peter, and John. Paul is going to show the absurdity of their claim by showing that when he went to Jerusalem to verify that he and the apostles were teaching the same message, those big three agreed with him.

And the opinion of the three in Jerusalem of Paul's teaching would be a significant milestone for the early church one way or the other. When you think about it, the unity of the church was at stake here.

Paul wanted to know whether he and the other apostles agreed. Were they going to let the false teachers disrupt the unity of that early church? Were the ones in Jerusalem going to insist on another standard for membership in the early church?

[13 : 54] Paul wanted to protect the churches he had planted among the Gentiles from being constantly attacked by those claiming authority from Jerusalem. The Judaizers could damage the faith of the Gentile Christians if they kept trying to spread their false message.

And some of those Christians might fall away from the standards of the gospel. In fact, that was what already was happening in Galatia. Galatians chapter 2 verses 3 through 10 document the results of Paul's meeting with the other apostles.

We'll look at verses 3 through 6 in the second section of the lesson. And in this second section, we see Paul's truth. So Paul's truth is your next set of blanks.

We'll start this section just by looking at verse 3. Verse 3 says, But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

Verse 3 plainly says that the church leaders made no requirement that Titus be circumcised. This was a major victory for grace over works.

[15 : 09] By this time, Judaism had become a very works-based religion, and no sign was more important for Jewish males than circumcision. We know that the Jews instituted many man-made requirements, but the requirement for circumcision came directly from God.

God instituted that requirement with the first Jew, which was Abraham himself. Listen to Genesis chapter 17 verses 9 and 10.

Genesis 17, 9 and 10 say, And God said to Abraham, As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring after you throughout their generations.

This is my covenant which you shall keep. Between me and you and your offspring after you, every male among you shall be circumcised. Then just a few verses later, God clearly stated the penalty for failing to comply with this directive.

And here is Genesis 17, 14. Genesis 17, 14 says, For any uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin shall be cut off from his people.

[16 : 22] He has broken my covenant. Being cut off from the covenant community meant loss of temporal benefits stemming from being part of the special chosen nation, even up to the point of death by divine judgment.

So you can see that if this new Christian religion planned to require Gentile converts to follow any aspect of Judaism, circumcision would have been the most likely one.

Acts 15, 1 shows that false teaching Judaizers were teaching that circumcision was indeed necessary for salvation. Here is Acts 15, 1.

But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved. Notice here that Paul skipped any secondary issues and went straight to the main point of contention with the Judaizers.

Paul should get a lot of credit for how boldly he addressed the issue, but we also need to acknowledge the courage that Titus showed. Titus was a recent Gentile convert, and for everything we see here, he willingly went with Paul to the center of Judaism itself, facing a risk that the leaders might compel him to follow the rules of Judaism.

[17:46] Paul saw the issue plainly, and the issue was more than a question of circumcision and uncircumcision, or of Gentile and Jewish customs. It was a matter of fundamental importance regarding the truth of the gospel, namely of Christian freedom versus bondage.

The Christian has been set free from the law in the sense that his acceptance before God depends entirely upon God's grace in the death of Jesus Christ received by faith.

To introduce the works of the law and to make our acceptance depend on our obedience to rules and regulations was to bring the free man back into bondage again. So, of this principle, Titus became the test case.

He was an uncircumcised Gentile, but he was a converted Christian. Having believed in Jesus, he had been accepted by God in Christ, and that, Paul said, was enough.

Nothing further was necessary for his salvation, and the council at Jerusalem later approved that, too. Despite the initial agreement of the apostles, the false teachers refused to give up.

[19:02] Look at verses 4 and 5 now. Paul wrote there, Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so they might bring us into slavery, to them we did not yield in submission, even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

For Paul, the liberty of free justification and adoption was at the very heart of the gospel. He proclaimed full pardon on the basis of the completed work of Christ to all that repents and believe. Any violation of this free justification would bring people under the bondage of legalism, and we know one way to define legalism is trying to earn salvation by human effort.

Circumcision was important in Jewish life, in addition to a variety of other laws established for the people of Israel. As part of God's word, none of the Old Testament laws were bad in and of themselves, but those laws become legalistic when they're accompanied by the belief that in doing them and in performing those acts, you can earn merit before God.

Verse 4 gives us a glimpse into the strategy of the false teachers. One commentator summarized the false teachers' strategy like this. He said, Because they are convinced they are right in their doctrinal interpretation, false teachers believe they can use any method to insinuate themselves into the church to entice people to follow them.

[20:42] Invariably, they resort to deception and trickery to capture the minds and hearts of God's people. They will even lie and take false vows to conceal their beliefs. They sneak in.

They hide their beliefs to worm themselves into the confidence of God's people. This activity has gone on throughout the history of the church and continues to this day. The leadership of the church must be vigilant and constantly on guard against false teachers.

For this reason, confessional integrity is important. Denominations and congregations that have confessional standards need to require faithful adherence to those statements of faith.

Verse 5 shows that Paul and the Jerusalem apostles refused to give in to the Judaizers. At the end of verse 5, Paul says that he and the other apostles stood firm so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.

We know that Paul originally wrote this letter to the Galatian churches, and those churches contained the original people for whom the truth of the gospel was preserved.

[21:53] But those Galatian churches were comprised of Gentile believers. So those words of Paul apply to any Gentile believer, and that means that the words of verse 5 apply to us as believers today just as much as those words applied to the Galatians back then.

We should be thankful that Paul and the other apostles held firm to the gospel of grace. Otherwise, we would be following many legalistic rituals today.

We have one more verse to cover in this section of the lesson. Look at Galatians 2.6. Here's what Paul said in that verse.

And from those who seem 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.

When Paul is referring to those who seem to be influential, he's referring to the big three again of Peter, John, and James. The ESV's rendering of verse 6 has that interesting parenthetical where Paul wrote, What they were makes no difference to me.

[23 : 03] God shows no partiality. Depending on the tone used when you read that phrase, the phrase could be considered an insult to Peter, John, and James.

Rather than insulting them, though, we can be confident that Paul simply was emphasizing that all believers have an equal standing before God. Paul had just as much authority as the other apostles.

Possibly, Paul's choice of words there was influenced by the Judaizers exaggerating the status of the Jerusalem apostles at the expense of Paul's status.

Perhaps the false brethren were drawing attention to what they regarded as the superior qualifications of James, Peter, and John. After all, James was one of the Lord's half-brothers, and Peter and John had belonged to the inner circle of Jesus.

And besides this, all three of them had known Jesus in the days when he walked the earth. We have no evidence that Paul actually knew Jesus when Jesus was doing his ministry on earth.

[24 : 11] But the most important thing we need to notice about verse 6 is verse 6's ending. Paul wrote, When given the opportunity, Peter, John, and James put no additional requirements on the gospel that Paul had been teaching to the Gentiles.

Paul got the validation he wanted, and he got the validation he expected. The other apostles affirmed that Paul's gospel matched their gospel. Contrary to what the Judaizers had been saying, only one gospel existed.

That was God's gospel, the gospel of grace alone. That gospel is still the only true gospel that exists today. Paul never would agree to anything being added to the gospel of grace as a requirement for salvation, even if it were only the ritual requirements of Jewish tradition.

Paul refused the notion that anything be appended to the perfectly complete atoning work of Christ on the cross. After all, nothing needed to be made in additional condition for a right standing with God.

So, so far, we have learned about Paul's trip to Jerusalem, and we've seen Paul's truth. Of course, we know that truth actually is God's truth, and that truth was affirmed by the other apostles.

[25 : 37] In the last section of tonight's lesson, we see Paul's task. So, Paul's task, plural, is your last blank. As we look at verses 7 through 10, we will see that the other apostles charged Paul with two specific tasks to do.

And in verses 7 through 10, Paul still was referring to how the other apostles added nothing to his gospel when he said this, On 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, for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised also worked through me for mine to the Gentiles.

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 uncircumcised, only they asked us to remember the poor the very thing I was eager to do.

This section was more important for the early church than we might first realize, and it's more important for the church now than we might first realize. Seeing that Paul had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised, the apostles in Jerusalem recognized Paul was entrusted with preaching the true gospel.

Instead of a division between Paul and the other apostles like the Judaizers claimed, clear unity existed. The only difference between Paul and the other apostles, if we can call it a difference, was the primary focus of their ministries.

[27 : 25] Peter's ministry would focus primarily on reaching the Jews. Paul would focus primarily on reaching the Gentiles, but even with those distinctions, the Bible is clear that both Peter and

Paul reached out to the other ethnic groups, too.

We've already mentioned that Peter was the first to go to the Gentiles and the Samaritans, and whenever Paul entered a new town, he went first to the Jewish synagogue.

Despite their primary focuses, neither apostle focused exclusively on any one group. Verse 8 further emphasizes that Paul and the other apostles were preaching the same message.

Verse 8 says, For he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles.

So all of those words boil down to the fact that Paul emphasized that the same God was working through both Peter and Paul. The unity of the apostles is emphasized again in verse 9.

[28 : 32] Verse 9 says, 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.

The Judaizers, as they sought to undermine Paul's ministry, probably referred to the Jewish apostles as the pillars of the church, meaning they were men of great reputation.

They likely told the Galatians that those of high reputation, the pillars of the church in Jerusalem, the Jerusalem apostles did not agree with Paul. So Paul uses that same terminology as he refutes their claim.

And in doing so, he also refutes the Judaizers' self-righteous pride by asserting that God is not a respecter of persons. We know from chapter 1 that Paul already has said that even if an angel from heaven were to preach a gospel, that person should be accursed and that angel should be accursed as well.

So Paul is using this language to emphasize that false teachers can never hide behind titles. Paul reminds us that regardless of how highly a man is esteemed, we cannot follow that man if he departs from the truth.

[29 : 53] That person is of no repute of the church of God if he departs from the truth. So Paul uses this language again to establish that there is only one gospel.

Peter, John, and James no doubt would have agreed with Paul's assessment. But notice how those pillars of the church treated Paul and Barnabas. Paul says that when they perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me.

So in other words, they shook hands with each other. Although that right hand of fellowship is extended to both Paul and Barnabas, Paul refers only to himself as the recipient of the grace. He's talking about the grace of the office of the apostle. That's where they recognized that Paul was an apostle Israel. And Joseph Pippa wrote, this might be the most significant handshake in the history of the human race.

It was much more important than world leaders shaking hands after an economic summit. In this handshake, the church united under one apostolic ministry.

[31 : 04] James, the moderator of the Jerusalem church, with Peter and John representing the twelve, extended the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. this handshake expressed that there was one message and one ministry.

He goes on to say, in that one handshake, at least 21 of the 27 New Testament books are directly represented. And he's talking there about Paul's epistles, John's gospel, and also revelation, along with John's letters.

But also, we have direct representation of Peter's two epistles, and James' epistle. Four more books are represented indirectly because Luke probably wrote under the influence of Paul, as did the writer to the Hebrews, if that wasn't Paul who wrote Hebrews.

And we know that Mark wrote under Peter's influence. So that leaves only Matthew and Jude of the New Testament books that aren't represented. But Matthew was one of the twelve, and he was represented by Peter, while Jude was another half-brother of Jesus, and so he was represented there by James.

So that one handshake, then, either directly or indirectly, represents the entirety of the New Testament. And that helps remind us that we indeed have received just one apostolic faith.

[32 : 30] Let's take a bit of a side trip here and consider how God validated the authority of the apostles. God testified to the authority of the apostles by giving them the authority to perform signs and wonders.

Hebrews chapter 2 verses 3 and 4 say, How shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his will.

2 Corinthians chapter 12 in verses 11 and 12 confirm that Paul was able to do the same types of signs, wonders, and miracles.

So here's the end of 2 Corinthians 11 along with all of verse 12. And again, this is 2 Corinthians chapter 12, the end of verse 11 and all of verse 12.

And Paul wrote there, getting back to our text in Galatians, the end of verse 9 has the first task that the Jerusalem apostles gave to Paul.

[33 : 56] Those apostles affirm that Paul should minister to the Gentiles while they focused on ministering to the Jewish people. Paul says that the other apostles confirmed that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

So the end of verse 9 emphasizes what already has been written in verses 7 and 8. We know that anything written once in Scripture is important.

Something written three times in three consecutive verses must really be important. So we can be confident then that God wanted Paul to focus primarily on the Gentiles and the other apostles to focus primarily on the Jews.

The second task that the apostles asked Paul, Barnabas, and Titus to do comes in verse 10. In verse 10 Paul says, only they ask us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Paul was committed to this principle as part of his missionary strategy. Providing relief to the poor was a very concrete way to express the unity of the church.

[35 : 10] In addition to meeting with the other apostles about the gospel, Paul and Barnabas were in Jerusalem on this occasion, delivering famine relief to the church at Jerusalem.

Acts chapter 11, verses 27 through 30 document the famine relief portion of Paul's trip. So here are Acts 11, 27 through 30.

Now in those days, prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch, and one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world.

This took place in the days of Claudius. So the disciples determined everyone according to his ability to send relief to the brothers living in Judea, which of course is where Jerusalem is, and they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.

Paul continued to care for the poor in the following years, and in the following years he organized his famous collection, and he urged the more wealthy Gentile churches of Macedonia and Achaia to support the poorer churches of Judea, and he regarded their gifts as a way to foster and demonstrate Jewish and Gentile solidarity in the fellowship of the new church.

[36 : 30] So remember the main idea. The other apostles endorsed Paul in his gospel while charging him to teach the gospel to the Gentiles and to remember the poor.

John Stott wrote, Some people who read these pages will no doubt be tempted to be impatient. It seems to them no more than a complicated rigmarole.

A visit of Paul to Jerusalem in the first century A.D., the question of whether Titus was circumcised or not, a consultation between Paul and the Jerusalem apostles, it all appears very remote and quite unrelated to modern-day problems.

But this is not so. At least two principles of utmost importance emerge from this paragraph. The first is that the truth of the gospel is one and unchanging.

When we were considering Galatians 1, verses 6-10, we saw that there is only one gospel. We now can elaborate on that and say that the whole New Testament presents this one gospel consistently.

[37 : 38] The apostles of Jesus Christ never contradict one another in the New Testament. We may see differences of style between them because their inspiration did not obliterate their individual personalities.

There are also differences of emphasis because they were called to different spheres and preached or wrote to different audiences. Consequently, they sometimes stress different aspects of the gospel, but they always complement one another.

There is only one gospel, that is the apostolic faith, and it's a recognizable body of doctrine taught by the apostles of Jesus Christ and preserved for us in the New Testament.

The second thing we see from this passage is that the truth of the gospel must be maintained. Paul was determined to resist the Judaizers, and when the truth of the gospel was at stake, he stood firm and refused to budge.

Let's get real practical for a minute with one way we can maintain the truth of the gospel. One way to maintain the truth of the gospel is to never let legalism get a foothold in our thinking.

[38 : 51] Today our problem may not be circumcision or Jewish law, but there are many things that we might do that can become legalistic if we look at them in the wrong way.

And those things include having a quiet time, studying the Bible, avoiding certain sins, coming to worship, and helping other people. All of these things are good, and we should do them, but when we do them thinking that we are earning God's favor, we're becoming legalistic.

All of us have this tendency because we're all recovering legalists. We all want to do something to earn our salvation. But this legalistic mindset carries over even after conversion, and we constantly have to fight that.

Paul's words, then, that we see here should serve as a warning to professing Christians. We must avoid this kind of legalism. Here's a quote from David Platt and Tony Morita that should remind us that we have no reason to be legalist.

They say, realize that God's pleasure in you is not based on your performance for him. Instead, God's pleasure in you is based on Christ's performance for you.

[40 : 05] And remember, even after we have been accepted by God, our good works are still the result of Christ's work in us. We must trust him daily to produce in us that which pleases God.

They continue by saying, but how do you know Christ will give you everything you need to follow his word? You know this because in the words of Paul that we will see later in chapter 2, he loves you and he gave himself for you.

You can trust Jesus to be everything you need or want and to be your life because he is passionate about you. He loves you. It's good to remember that God's passion is for the world and for all peoples and that Christ died for all peoples in all nations.

That's biblical Christianity. But we want to remind you that Christ died on the cross for you. Jesus is not only passionate about you, but he has paid a price for you.

He gave himself for you on the cross so that his life with all of its present and eternal benefits might be yours. And then they say, so let's trust him.

[41 : 14] We are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. As Paul said it so well in Romans 5 8, God showed his love for us and while that we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this reminder that there is only one gospel. when we are tempted to become legalists ourselves, help us remember that we can do nothing to earn your favor, but Christ has done everything needed for us to be in your favor.

Help us also use this knowledge to free others who are parts of legalistic religions now from the bondage that they experience by trying to earn their salvation.

Help us show them that there is nothing for them to earn, they just need to have faith. In Jesus name we pray, amen. Amen. Thank you.