

Paul's purpose in writing the Galatians was to combat the false teaching that being circumcised and keeping the Law of Moses was necessary for salvation. In chapter 1 Paul argued that the gospel that he preached was God-given and not man made, and in chapter 2, he continues by demonstrating that the apostles in Jerusalem were in complete agreement with the gospel of grace that he preached.

---

1 Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

Paul is referring to another visit he made to Jerusalem, which is recorded in Acts 15:1-22. After having returned from their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas remained and ministered in Antioch until certain Jewish teachers from Judea arrived insisting that the Gentile believers were not yet saved until they had been circumcised and began obeying the Mosaic Law (Acts 15:1, 5). Of course, Paul and Barnabas vehemently disagreed with this teaching and it was decided that they should go to Jerusalem with these Jewish teachers to settle this question with the apostles. Paul tells us that this visit happened fourteen years after the one mentioned in Gal. 1:18. In addition to Barnabas, Paul mentions that Titus also came with him, perhaps to serve as an example of a genuine Gentile believer. The reason for this visit was to confront the same false teaching which motivated Paul to write this epistle to the Galatians.

---

2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

**“And I went up by [through; according to] revelation [disclosure of truth]”** – Many commentators interpret this as Paul saying that he went to Jerusalem because God instructed him to do so, but other commentators disagree by pointing out that Acts 15:2 says that Paul and Barnabas were sent by the church at Antioch. Since the word “by” can also be translated as “according to,” Paul may be saying that he didn't go to Jerusalem to defend a man-made gospel but to defend the gospel that had been revealed to him by Jesus Christ (**Gal. 1:11-12** “*But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ*”).

**“and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation”** – Paul was not ashamed of the gospel that he preached to the Gentiles and described it to the apostles behind closed doors. The apostles were the official spokespersons for Christ since they had personally been with Jesus, and so Paul could easily have been intimidated by them. They could easily have picked Paul's gospel apart if it was flawed or incomplete, but they did not (v. 7).

**“lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain”** – It is unlikely that Paul is saying that he consulted with the apostles because he was concerned that he had gotten the gospel wrong because his point so far in Galatians has been that the gospel he preached came from God. It seems that he is pointing out to the Galatians that if the gospel that he preached was incomplete or in error then the apostles would have had the opportunity to correct him, which they did not. There is no evidence in Acts 15 that the apostles corrected or rebuked Paul; instead it seems that they were in full agreement with Paul and Barnabas' position that salvation was by grace through faith alone.

---

3 But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

In addition to keeping the Law of Moses, the false teaching that prompted the debate in Acts 15 included the requirement of circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5), as was the false teaching that led the Galatians astray (Gal. 5:2-3, 6, 11; 6:12-15). However, Paul points out that while in Jerusalem, Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile believer, was accepted by the apostles without being required to be circumcised. The word “neither” indicates that not only did the apostles accept the gospel that Paul preached, but they also did not insist on the circumcision of Titus.

---

4 And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

**“And that because of false brethren unawares brought in [secretly brought in]”** – Paul makes the strong statement that his trip to Jerusalem was necessary because of “false brethren” in the church. These Jews are described as “false brethren” and their insistence that Gentile believers should be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law in addition to faith in Christ exposed the fact that their faith was not truly in Christ and thus could not truly be saved. Paul says they were “unawares brought in,” implying that they were accepted into the church without realizing what they were. These “false brethren” were attempting to add works to faith in Christ, which Paul says defeats the purpose of grace (**Gal. 2:21** “*I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.*”; **Gal. 5:4** “*Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law; ye are fallen from grace*”).

**“who came in privily [secretly; by stealth] to spy out [to inspect closely in order to plot against] our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus”** – The Greek wording that Paul uses pictures these false brethren as undercover enemy agents who had entered by stealth in order to find weaknesses. They did not approve of the freedom that faith in Christ brings and wanted to examine that faith for ways to circumvent that freedom.

**“that they might bring us into bondage”** – Rather than recognize the truth that faith in Christ brings freedom from sin, they instead looked for a means to turn believers away from exclusive faith in Christ and bring them back under the bondage of the law that could never bring forgiveness of sins (Heb. 10:11).

---

5 To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

**“To whom we gave place [to yield] by subjection [obedience], no, not for an hour”** – Knowing that such a distorted and false gospel could never bring salvation to the lost, Paul and Barnabas did not tolerate this teaching for a moment. In fact, they argued vehemently against it (**Acts 15:2** “*When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question*”).

**“that the truth of the gospel might continue [remain permanently] with you”** – Paul and Barnabas fought against this false teaching so that the truth and integrity of the gospel would be forever established for the Galatians.

---

6 But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed *to be somewhat* in conference added nothing to me:

Paul begins a statement concerning the leaders (apostles and elders) of the church in Jerusalem that he concludes in v. 7. He comments that they “seemed to be somewhat” meaning that they were held in high regard as leaders. However, a person’s reputation meant nothing to Paul since it is not reputation that earns God’s approval – it is the truth of the gospel. Thus Paul’s meeting with the apostles did not alter or improve the gospel that he preached.

---

7 But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision was unto Peter; 8 (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

**“But contrariwise”** – Or “on the contrary.” Instead instructing Paul or adding to the gospel that he preached, the apostles instead accepted and approved of his ministry (v. 9).

**“when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision was unto Peter”** – The apostles recognized that Paul had been called to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in the same way that Peter had been called to minister to the Jews. The “gospel of the uncircumcision” was slightly different from the “gospel of the circumcision” in the sense of the intended audience, but the essential elements were the same. Salvation comes by grace through faith in Christ to both Jew and Gentile, a fact which Peter testified of in Jerusalem (**Acts 15:11** “*But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they*”). However, Gentiles were not required to keep the Law of Moses, despite the Jews apparently still being expected to do so (Paul being welcomed back to Jerusalem by the church leaders just before he was arrested: **Acts 21:20, 24** “*And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law....Them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.”).*

**“For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles”** – The apostles recognized that the same God that had called Peter to be an apostle and worked through him to minister to the Jews was the same God that called Paul as an apostle and worked through him to minister to the Gentiles.

---

9 And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

**“And when James, Cephas [Peter], and John, who seemed [reputed; to be considered] to be pillars”** – Paul now points out the acceptance that he had with the heads of the Jerusalem church. He lists three of the leaders who “seemed to be pillars” (were considered to be the foremost church leaders): James (the half-brother of Jesus), Cephas (another name for Peter), and John (Peter’s frequent companion and fellow-apostle).

**“perceived the grace that was given unto me”** – When James, Peter and John understood the revelation of the gospel that God had given Paul and how that God had been using him to spread the gospel among the Gentiles...

**“they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship”** – Rather than attempt to “correct” what was lacking in Paul’s understanding of the gospel, these leaders of the Jerusalem church accepted both Paul and Barnabas into full fellowship gave their approval of the gospel they preached.

**“that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision”** – James, Peter and John understood that God had given Paul and Barnabas a ministry to a different group of people. God had given Paul and Barnabas the task of ministering to the Gentiles while James, Peter and John were to minister to the Jews.

---

10 Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

**“Only *they would* that we should remember the poor”** – Most commentators interpret this request as being for the poor Jewish believers in Judea. Many such believers in the early church were poor because of the rejection and persecution that they suffered because of their faith in Christ.

**“the same which I also was forward [to hasten; to endeavor; to give diligence] to do”** – Paul already had a heart for the poor and was often involved in collecting contributions for them (**Acts 11:28-30** “*And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judaea: Which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul*”).