

Chapter 2 is a continuation of Chapter 1. Paul is defending his apostolic authority and the gospel that he preached.

Sometime after Paul had established the churches of Galatia, other teachers had come preaching a different gospel, which in 1:7 Paul says is no gospel at all, but a perversion of the truth . . . they insisted that Gentiles be circumcised (6:12; 5:2) and keep the Jewish feasts (4:10) if they wanted to be justified and reach completion as Christians (3:3). The Judaizers thought Paul's gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone was inadequate. So they added their other requirements. But to make their version of the gospel stick, they had to discredit Paul's authority as an apostle. They had done this in Paul's absence by saying Paul was a second-hander at best. He was not one of the original twelve apostles who were with Jesus during his life. Therefore, he had learned his gospel secondhand at best from the Jerusalem apostles and had adapted it in illegitimate ways. His authority was not binding because it only came from man not God (Piper, Gal 2:1-10 @ [www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)).

Paul had said that he was not living to please men (1:10); he had received both his position and the gospel by direct revelation from Christ on the Damascus road (Acts 9, 26). He couldn't have received the gospel from the apostles for he didn't have any contact with them for three years after he was saved, and when he finally did meet them he only saw Peter in Jerusalem for 15 days, and briefly met James. The next visit to Jerusalem was 14 years after his conversion (Schreiner, 114; or it could be fourteen years from his meeting with Peter).

The Judaizers claimed to represent the apostles in Jerusalem, but their message did not square with Paul's message. So even if Paul's authority were to be settled in chapter 1, another question arises: Is there disunity among the apostles? Galatians 2:1–10 answers this.

***2:1 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.***

***2:2 It was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.***

For fourteen years Paul had been preaching the gospel independently of the other apostles' opinions. Though he clearly didn't feel a need to get their endorsement, he felt that God had directed him to go to Jerusalem and relate to the apostles the gospel he had been preaching (which fits better with Acts 11:27-30 than Acts 15 - Schreiner, 120). When he arrived, he met privately with Peter, James, and John, who were of high reputation in the church in Jerusalem (2:2, Cf. 2:6, 9).

Paul's meeting was in private because he feared that he might be running, or had run, in vain. Some argue that this means that Paul really wondered if he had made a mistake in his preaching, but this would contradict the whole tenor of the book up to this point; Paul was sure that the gospel he preached was from God. In Chapter 1 he had said he received it by divine revelation, and that anyone

who preached a different gospel than him was accursed. The best way to see Paul's comments is from a pragmatic perspective. The truthfulness of the gospel that Paul had preached wouldn't change no matter what the apostles thought of it, but practically speaking, Paul's ministry would be severely hindered if the apostles in Jerusalem sent out an edict declaring Paul's gospel to be in error.

The fact that Barnabas was traveling with Paul supports the theory that the churches in Galatia were in the southern part of the Roman province (see introduction to the book), for Barnabas didn't travel with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys when scholars speculate that Paul may have gone to the north Galatia area. They had a sharp and well-known disagreement as to whether they should take Mark on the second missionary journey, which caused them to part company (Acts 15:35-39). In the end, Barnabas' faith in Mark was vindicated, which Paul acknowledged (Col. 4:10; 2 Tim. 4:11; Philm. 24). Titus also worked closely with Paul. The Book of Titus, written by Paul, was addressed to him. He was a Gentile and uncircumcised.

***2:3 But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.***

***2:4 But it was because of the false brethren secretly brought in, who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.***

***2:5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.***

In the OT, circumcision was necessary to be part of the covenant community (Gen. 17:9-14), and was thought to be so important that the term became synonymous with "Jew" (Ro. 15:8). Since the ministry of James, Peter, and John was primarily to Jews, it is reasonable to think that they might be tempted to yield to the Judaizers' demand that people be circumcised, but they didn't even suggest this of Titus (2:3).

In the midst of the meeting, however, some Jews came in uninvited and attempted to make circumcision an issue (2:4). Paul is extremely harsh toward them – he calls them false brethren who wanted to destroy the liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage. They were in bondage themselves, but instead of desiring to be set free, they wished that others would join them in their bondage.

Those who live under the old age of the law are enslaved, whereas those who are in Christ live in the new era in which God's saving promises are being fulfilled. The false brothers insisted that Titus had to be circumcised to belong to the people of God. It is remarkable that Paul, who had observed the Torah his entire life, now views such a requirement as the imposition of slavery.

In Galatians 3-4 Paul argues that subjection to the law does not bring freedom but enslaves. Requiring the law for salvation does not free people from sin but places them under the reign of sin. Reverting to the law is a yoke of slavery because human beings cannot keep the demands of the law. Hence, they groan under the law's demands, which they cannot fulfill. The freedom and

liberty of the gospel were at stake when the opponents in Jerusalem tried to insist that Titus be circumcised (Schreiner, 125).

It should be noted that Paul was not outrightly opposed to Gentiles being circumcised. He had Timothy circumcised in Acts 16:3, and told him to follow certain Jewish practices so that he would not cause offense. However, under the conditions here, had Titus been circumcised, the truth of the gospel would have been blurred (2:5). Timothy's circumcision had nothing to do with salvation; rather, it was an exercise of his Christian freedom to be like a Jew to win the Jews. This was not the case with Titus; the Jews insisted he needed to be circumcised to be saved. Had the apostles yielded to this demand, the gospel itself would have been tainted.

Paul holds this example up to the Galatians as a model for them to follow. Just as he did not tolerate the Judaizers' insistence that Titus be circumcised, neither should the churches he founded allow circumcision to be imposed upon them. To yield would undermine the gospel.

***2:6 But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.***

***2:7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised***

***2:8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),***

***2:9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.***

***2:10 They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do.***

Paul again refers to the Jerusalem leaders as those of reputation, but he is clear that they should not be venerated for the position that they held (2:6). Presumably, the Judaizers argued that the apostles in Jerusalem were of higher authority than Paul, and that they agreed with them in their understanding of the gospel. Paul does not dismiss the apostles' position, but is clear that position and rank do not matter to God. The content of the gospel is true no matter what people of position think of it. Once again, Paul's comments show he was not motivated by trying to please men (1:10).

The apostles added nothing to the gospel (2:6). This demonstrated that the content of Paul's gospel and theirs was the same. They agreed with Paul, not the Judaizers, in their understanding of the gospel. In fact, contrary to what the Judaizers were thinking, the "pillars" acknowledged that God had set Paul apart to minister to the Gentiles just as surely as He had set them apart to minister to the Jews (2:7-8). Paul was viewed as a co-laborer in the harvest field.

Rather than insisting that Paul preach that one must be circumcised to be saved, they gave him and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that they might go to the Gentiles (2:9). The only request that the apostles in Jerusalem made was that Paul assist the poor as he evangelized. Paul agreed with this

wholeheartedly (2:10), but this could hardly be conceived as something that Paul needed to add to his gospel.

As a result of this meeting, Paul knew that his ministry was not in vain; the pillars of the church preached the same gospel. Peter's comments in Acts 15:7-11 make this clear. The Judaizers did not represent the Jerusalem apostles.

The first 10 verses of Chapter 2 teach us a number of things:

1. *There are false teachers in churches.* The false teachers that Paul was confronting were men that professed that Jesus was the Messiah, yet Paul calls them "false brethren." In 1:8 and 9 he calls them "accursed." In 1 John 2:18-19 John also warns us of false teachers among the ranks of Christians. He says, "Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour. *They went out from us, but they were not really of us*; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us." If they "went out," then they were once considered "in." In 1 Corinthians 5:11 Paul speaks of immoral people in the church as "so-called brothers." A "so-called brother" is one in name only. Jude 1:3-4 says, "Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints. For certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ." Jesus warned that there would be tares among the wheat in the same field (Matt. 13:24-30), that is, that true believers and others that resemble true believers would coexist side by side.

The Judaizers were not simply saying that works are the evidence of salvation. We would agree with this. Rather, they were insisting that works are the basis of salvation. As Paul will show, any gospel that professes that something must be added to the work of Christ is a false gospel.

2. *The gospel brings freedom while the law brings bondage.* Paul said that the false brethren came to spy out "our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage." Trying to live under the law puts us in bondage because the law does not have the power to free us from sin. Grace brings freedom because under grace we do not need to try to work our way to God; instead, we can be secure in our salvation and Christ gets the glory for His saving work. Of course, grace does not give us license to sin; it transforms us from within and empowers us to do works that please God.

3. "The fact that Paul went up to Jerusalem by revelation teaches us that *Christ wants us to confront disagreement head on.* If we are going to be a biblical people, we must be a confronting people. If we think someone is wrong, or if we think the ministry of the church might be in jeopardy, we must seek God for grace to go to the person and lay before them our position. Almost none of us do that naturally. It creates tense feelings, and we would just as soon avoid it. But the desire for personal comfort and the fear of conflict which hinder our confronting one another in love do not spring from faith in Christ. They

are not the fruit of the Spirit. They are products of the flesh. They are the kind of thing we experience when we do not look to Christ for resources of power beyond ourselves" (Piper, Gal 2:1-10 @ [www.desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringGod.org)).

4. *These verses also teach us the proper attitude toward authority.* Paul recognized the authority of others, but he did not venerate them, nor would he tolerate any teaching that contradicted the gospel. Throughout the centuries God has given His church gifted teachers, but we must guard against following them and their teaching blindly. The Bible is clear that we all stumble in many ways (Ja. 3:2). The reformers fought for the principle of *sola scriptura* (Scripture only) only to have (practically speaking) their interpretations of Scripture raised to the level of Scripture itself. How many times have I read defenses of what Calvin or Luther have said when what really matters is what Scripture says, not men. We can be grateful for gifted teachers, but must not put them on a pedestal to the point where we replace the Word of God with their words.

***2:11 But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.***

***2:12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.***

***2:13 The rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.***

***2:14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"***

In Jerusalem Paul discussed with the apostles the issue of circumcision. In Antioch the issue was Jewish dietary laws. The words "compel" and "the truth of the gospel" make a connection between verses 1-10 and 11-14. In verse 3 Paul pointed out that no one in Jerusalem *compelled* Titus to follow the OT law and be circumcised. They did this so that *the truth of the gospel* might remain (2:5). Now in 2:11ff., Paul rebukes Peter because by his actions he was *compelling* the Gentiles to live like Jews (2:14), and in doing so was not straightforward about *the truth of the gospel*. By his actions, Peter was insinuating that justifying grace was not enough for fellowship. The truth of the gospel was not shaping his character. The point being that it is possible to contradict the freedom of the gospel in our lives though we know it in our heads.

Peter understood the freedom of the gospel (Acts 10:9-16; 11:2-18, especially 10:34-35 and 11:16-18) and had been eating with fellow believers who were Gentiles, but to do so he had to neglect the Jewish dietary restrictions found in the OT. However, when a delegation sent from James appeared, Peter withdrew from eating with the Gentiles because he was afraid of what the party of the circumcision would think. "The party of the circumcision" could be either unbelieving or believing Jews; it could refer to the delegation sent from James, or the "false brethren" who required circumcision; or it could be some other group as well.

We do not know what James' concern was; perhaps he was just bothered that Peter had abandoned the dietary restrictions and he felt that his actions would be scandalous to the unbelieving Jews whom they were trying to reach. Or maybe James had not fully come to know the freedom of the gospel himself, and was struggling with what he knew and how to practice it. Whatever the reason, Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles so the accusations of the men from James would stop.

If Peter refused to eat with the Gentiles, he was living as if our right relationship with God needed not only faith in Jesus but submission to the rules and regulations found in the OT economy; he would in essence be saying that full fellowship was only possible if the dietary restrictions were kept. The gospel governs both our beliefs and our actions; Peter's action was out of step with the truth of the gospel.

Because Peter's actions were public, Paul rebuked him publically and asked, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?"

Peter had given up the Jewish way of life and was no longer eating strictly kosher foods. Paul says he was a Jew living like a Gentile. But then when he reverted back to his Jewish lifestyle under the law and refused to eat with the Gentiles, he was forcing the Gentiles to adapt to a Jewish way of life. He was making them be like the Jews.

To understand how Peter's action made Gentiles be like Jews, we must assume that Jews and Gentiles sharing meals together was a way that equal status among the people of God could be seen. By withdrawing from Gentiles based on the OT law, Peter was in effect demanding that the Gentiles meet them on their Jewish terms; they must take up the law themselves if they wanted to reestablish fellowship with the Jews. To require this of the Gentiles was to abandon the grace of the God which is the fundamental hallmark of the gospel (Moo, 151).

Compelling people to do things that are not connected with the gospel puts Peter in the same category as the false brethren who wanted Titus to be circumcised (2:3). Nevertheless, Paul does not call Peter a false brother for Peter was acting hypocritically; that is, he was not acting in connection with his own convictions. Those who wanted Titus to be circumcised believed that he had to be circumcised to be saved; Peter made no such connections with dietary restrictions. However, he did need to be rebuked because his actions were communicating to others that submission to the law was necessary to be a Christian. And what makes matters worse is that Peter's position and actions resulted in other Jews following suit and joining him in hypocrisy; even Barnabas was carried away by it.

Paul's intent is not to air Peter's dirty laundry, but what Paul has to say is crucial to the future of the Christian faith. The issue is whether the work of Christ is enough to save sinners and reconcile them to God or do we need to add something more? Can we glory in the cross of Christ alone or is there some unfinished work that needs to be done to complete it? When Peter added to the work of Christ, he demeaned the glory of the cross. Adding our own works to the salvation secured by Christ doesn't make us "holier than thou," it makes us holier than God! Secondly, is the church a fellowship of sinners saved by grace, or is it a fellowship where grace is not enough? Do we need to add the law to grace to make

fellowship work? Thirdly, Peter's actions were denying believers freedom from Jewish customs. He was putting believers under a yoke of slavery. If we need more than God's sovereign, justifying grace through the finished work of Christ, we are engaging in fundamental error.

We see that Peter's actions demonstrate that we all can stumble. Even mature believers fall short of being perfect examples. We will be reminded throughout our lives that apart from Christ we can do nothing. "We cannot live on yesterday's grace; we need fresh grace for each new day, and so we are called upon every day to rely on God's grace in Christ" (Schreiner, 148).

We also see that an individual's sin impacts others. When Peter sinned, others followed his behavior. We are part of a body with other believers and our sin will affect the whole body whether we see it or not. At the same time, godliness spreads as well. An important question to ask is, "Does any habit or action we have contradict the gospel?" Or positively, are we in step with the truth of the gospel? Does our action reflect the gospel? Does it look like the kind of action that would flow from the gospel?

A third point that is worth observing is that Christians should rebuke other Christians if the circumstances call for it. This Paul did, even though the one he rebuked was of high reputation.

***2:15 "We are Jews by nature and not sinners from among the Gentiles;***

Verses 15-21 are a short form of the gospel that Paul proclaims, especially in relation to works of the law. These verses, though addressed to Peter, are extremely important to this letter for they form an interpretive key to understanding what follows.

The word "sinners" in verse 15 is used in a limited sense. Paul does not mean that Jews aren't sinners, but Gentiles are. He means that he and Peter, as kosher Jews, were not guilty of the flagrant and constant neglect of the Jewish dietary laws. Gentiles, on the other hand, were all automatically in the category of "sinners" in the sense that they neither knew nor kept the rigorous legal requirements of Jewish life (Piper).

However, even though Paul and Peter were brought up as law-keeping Jews, both had come to realize that no one can gain a right standing before God on the basis of efforts to keep laws; "man is not justified by the works of the Law." Rather, man is declared righteous (justified) through faith in Christ Jesus (2:16).<sup>1</sup> (see notes on Galatians 2:15-18)

***2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.***

Even as Jews who were already in a covenant relationship with God, they put their faith in Christ, not the law. No human is justified by the law, whether they are a Jew or a Gentile; Paul tells Peter, "we (you

and I, Peter) know that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus . . . for by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.” The covenant that they were under as Jews was insufficient to put them in a right standing with God because as humans, they would inevitably fail to keep the law perfectly. If this is the case, then why is Peter requiring Gentiles to submit to food laws, when following the law does nothing to improve their standing before God?