

Galatians 2:1-5

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Paul went to Jerusalem to discuss the Gospel with the apostles there. They all agreed that Gentiles did not have to be circumcised to be saved, in opposition to some who argued that believers must follow the law. The law imprisons us, but Jesus frees us.

After fourteen years of mission work and church planting, Paul returned to Jerusalem. He was accompanied by Barnabas, his fellow missionary and church planter, and Titus, a Gentile believer. Paul had only briefly known the elders in Jerusalem, having visited once before. Paul began preaching in Jerusalem a few years after his Damascus Road conversion, but apparently it wasn't long before Paul's life was in danger again, so he was sent abroad by believers to Tarsus (Acts 9:29-30). In chapter 1, Paul references this brief time in Jerusalem, where he met Peter and James, and stayed among them for only fifteen days, before departing (1:18-19).

Fourteen years passed before Paul returned to Jerusalem, to speak *in private to those who were of reputation*, which included James and Peter and John (verse 9). In speaking with them, Paul *submitted* his *gospel* to them, explaining to these men what he had been preaching to the Gentiles for the past fourteen years. Part of this event is likely recounted for us in Acts 15. Some Jewish authorities had come from Jerusalem to Antioch with a competing gospel, saying that it was necessary for Gentiles to be circumcised (and keep the Mosaic Law) in order to be saved. Paul disagreed, and journeyed to Jerusalem to appeal to the Apostles and Elders of the Jerusalem church.

Paul likely hoped to get on the same page with the authorities in Jerusalem, or discover if they were in disagreement. Either way, Paul needed to know what he was facing. Paul had experienced corrupters of the gospel many times already, and was prompted to go to Jerusalem again because of the false gospel being advocated.

Acts 15 provides the background of what Paul is referencing in this epistle, as well as the details of the debate in Jerusalem. While in Antioch, Paul combatted Jewish teachers who told Gentile believers to be circumcised. In response, "when Paul and Barnabas had great dissension and debate with them, the brethren determined that Paul and Barnabas and some others of them should go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders concerning this issue" (Acts 15:2).

Paul's mention of taking Titus with him to Jerusalem is important. Titus *who was a Greek* (meaning he was a Gentile believer) had not been circumcised. And, importantly, during their visit to Jerusalem, Titus was not *compelled to be circumcised*. Titus' faith was in Jesus, his justification was found in the cross, not in assimilating to the religious practices of Judaism.

While in Jerusalem, in the midst of conferring with the elders and apostles about the true gospel, a sect of the Pharisees who had believed stood up, saying, "It is necessary to circumcise them and to direct them to observe the law of Moses." (Acts 15:5). These Pharisees likely are cut from the same cloth as the *false brethren* in this passage who *sneaked in* to declare that circumcision

and law-following was part of salvation. In Acts, Luke writes that these Pharisees did believe in Jesus, but were adding to the gospel. Here in Galatians, *false brethren* does not necessarily mean people pretending to be believers in Jesus. Rather, their teaching and conduct was deceitful and in error. They were false in their teaching.

These competing Jewish “authorities” were adamant that all believers in Christ also needed to become circumcised and obey the Old Testament Law. Paul explains to the Galatian readers that this message would *bring us into bondage*, in contrast to the *liberty which we have in Christ Jesus*.

We cannot find justification before God through obeying the law or adopting Jewish customs, like circumcision. And we cannot find power over sin in our daily walk through following religious rules. Trying to reform the flesh by following religious rules just provides a return to be enslaved to our sin nature.

Believers have freedom in Jesus, because Jesus set us free through our faith in Him. He justified us in the presence of God. That is an unconditional gift for all who believe in Him. When we believe in Him, we are spiritually reborn. We are given a resurrected nature through Him. After experiencing this new birth, we have the power to overcome sin in our daily lives, but only through walking by faith in the power of our resurrected nature.

So, Paul tells the Galatians that in response to the competing Pharisees’ teaching, he and Titus rejected it outright: *we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour*. Paul and company were committed to *the truth of the gospel*, for the sake of Gentile believers. It would be incorrect and enslaving to compel Gentile believers to become circumcised and to force them to obey the law. This makes it clear that Paul did not go to Jerusalem to discover the truth, but to find out whether the existing authorities were following the gospel—or had been corrupted. Paul went to Jerusalem *because of a revelation*. God was calling Paul to defend the gospel.

Biblical Text

¹Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. ²It 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. ³But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴But 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. ⁵But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.