

CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

717 North Stapley Drive, Mesa, AZ 85203 Phone: (480) 833-7500

Series:	Galatians		Pastor/Teacher
Number:	8		Gary L.W. Johnson
Text:	Galatians 2:1-5		
Date:	February 8, 2026 (a.m.)		

THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

“In the world of modern evangelism, observes the late John MacArthur, “it is allowable to advocate the most unconventional, unbiblical doctrine – as long as you afford everyone else the same privilege. About the only thing that is taboo nowadays is the intolerance of those who dare to point out others’ error. Anyone today who is bold enough to suggest that someone else’s ideas or doctrines are unsound or unbiblical is dismissed at once as contentious, divisive, unloving, or unchristian. It is all right to *espouse* any view you wish, but it is not all right to *criticize* another person’s views – no matter how patently unbiblical those views may be.”¹ In the same vein, Philip Ryken writes: “It is not easy to defend the truth in an age of lies. These days people want to make up their own good news. They do not want to be told that there is one and only one way of salvation. They will put up with Christianity only as long as it minds its own business. Therefore, the church is under great pressure to compromise its message. But there is one thing we will not give up, and that is the freedom we have in Christ. Salvation comes only by his death and resurrection. We will not let anyone add to or subtract anything from his cross and empty tomb. With Martin Luther, we say that *we can stand the loss of our possessions, our name, our life, and everything else; but we will not let ourselves be deprived of the Gospel, our faith, and Jesus Christ. And that is that.*”²

We are repeatedly told that the church’s failure is traceable to a lack of unity. This is her greatest sin – and what is to blame for the dreadful situation? *Doctrine*, pure and simple, is the culprit. We are told that we need to form a united coalition for the sake of world evangelism and to fight the evils of secular humanism. This is no time for theological debates and doctrinal precision! This notion of unity is, in fact, an idol that is used to stifle any legitimate dissent – and it is positively deadly to the health of the church. The famous English philosopher and statesman, Francis Bacon (1561-1626), said that unity that is formed on expediency is, in reality, grounded upon an implicit ignorance, noting that all colors will look the same in the dark! Luther put it best: “Unity wherever possible, truth at all costs.” To this the Apostle Paul would have wholeheartedly agreed. The truth was at stake in the churches in Galatia and Paul will not sacrifice the truth upon the altar of toleration for the sake of unity.³

I. **THE REASON FOR PAUL’S SECOND VISIT TO JERUSALEM.** The Apostle is still defending himself and his gospel. The Judaizers told the Galatians that this visit was an act of submission on Paul’s part. Yes, Paul went to Jerusalem, but he did so because of a revelation that God gave him and probably in conjunction with the controversy mentioned in Acts 15:1-39.

- A. ***The Case of Titus.*** The significance of Titus should be noted – he was a Gentile, and he was not compelled to be circumcised, even in Jerusalem. The point Paul is making is clear – circumcision as demanded by the Judaizers as part of the terms of the gospel was not required even in Jerusalem, to say nothing of the Gentile Christians living in the Gentile world!
- B. ***The Content of Paul’s Gospel.*** When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he set before them the gospel that he preached. The verb *anethemēn*, translated “set forth,” conveys the idea of consultation.⁴ Was this done to see if Paul’s law-free gospel was correct? Was Paul seeking their authorization? No. He did not go

to Jerusalem as a humble petitioner, but as a tough negotiator. What then does the expression “for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain” mean? It does *not* mean that Paul feared his gospel might be wrong; otherwise, everything he had said to this point would be moot. The athletic metaphor (running a race) is used to describe a futile procedure, i.e., a race in which it is impossible to win. If, in fact, Paul’s gospel was not the same as preached by the other apostles, the *progress* of the church would have been seriously damaged. Unless that Judaizing propaganda (Paul’s gospel is not in harmony with the apostles in Jerusalem) is stopped, his labor among the Gentiles will, to a certain extent, be in vain. In what sense? Well, not in vain because his gospel would be any less true than it was before, but because of the practical results of the false teaching. “So long as the Gentiles were allowed to think that these apostles were hostile to Paul, a serious contradiction seemed to be introduced into the apostolic witness.”⁵

Note: Paul laid before the other apostles the *gospel* he was preaching. He did not simply relate to them the results of his ministry. It is the content of the message that is of utmost importance. This is just the opposite emphasis we hear so often today.

II. **PAUL’S PLAIN LANGUAGE: FALSE BRETHREN.** Titus was a vivid illustration that the Judaizers taught a false gospel. As such, they were false brethren and their gospel is to be rejected.

- A. **Their Character.** A person who *claims* to be a Christian has to demonstrate by his conduct and creed that he is indeed a true Christian. As J. Gresham Machen so keenly observed, “These Judaizers might have seemed to a superficial observer to be true disciples, but in their heart of hearts, Paul seems to mean they were Pharisees rather than disciples of Jesus Christ. They were depending upon their own works for salvation, and according to the Apostle Paul, a man cannot possibly do that if he is to be saved. So Paul calls them false brethren. Unlike the leaders of the modern church, the Apostle Paul believed in calling things by their true names.”⁶
- B. **Their Conduct.** Their activity is covert. They *infiltrated* (*pareisagō*, the word implies stealth, used of a traitor inside the camp⁷). They did this in order to *spy out* (*kataskopeō*, to reconnoitre, to make a treacherous investigation) the freedom that believers have in Christ Jesus. This was a planned campaign. Their intention was to bring the Gentile Christians under the obligations of the Law – something that Paul calls *bondage*.

III. **PAUL AND THE QUESTION OF PRINCIPLE.** When the occasion demanded it, the Apostle Paul did not hesitate to stand firmly on a principle that might seem incidental or even unimportant to others. “We did not give in to them for a moment.” The plural pronoun refers to Paul and the rest of the Apostles; no compromise, no meeting halfway. In other instances, Paul was willing to accommodate himself in order to aid the influence of the gospel (cf. Galatians 4:12; 1 Corinthians 9:19-23; Acts 16:3; 21:23ff.) “But this time the issue was drawn in *optima forma* and he knew no yielding.”⁸

- A. **The Integrity of the Gospel.** When it came to the centrality of the Gospel message, Paul proved to be unmovable. The Gospel cannot be compromised in the slightest degree. There is an implied contrast made by the phrase “the truth of the gospel.” The *other* gospel is *false* and Paul misses no opportunity to totally discredit the false brethren in the eyes of the Galatians. Note the language at the end of verse 5: “so that the truth of the gospel *might remain with you*.” Yielding to the Judaizers would have eliminated grace from the Gospel, and this would have a devastating effect on the churches in Galatia. “When false brethren want to lead the saints into bondage, it is our duty,” declares Calvin, “not to yield to them.”⁹

CONCLUSION: Unity inspired by the love of the truth is most commendable, but anything short of this is sure to spell trouble. If we suppress doctrine in the interest of unity, we compromise the truth. But what is happening in Evangelicalism today? The whole concept of truth has been abandoned. The notion that truth is something that can actually be defined has given way to a sentimental and emotional notion of unity and fellowship that charges

any polemical voice as being anti-Christian. We are told that we must never criticize; we must never be negative. We must always be kind and friendly. This is not, I repeat, this is not the attitude of the Apostle Paul. We must speak the truth in love (Ephesians 4:15). This is what Paul is doing in his epistle to the Galatians. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of truth (John 14:17) and He will honor nothing but the truth. God's people are to be sanctified by the truth (John 17:17). Therefore, we must preserve the truth of the Gospel and not allow it to be perverted – even by well-meaning brethren. We must insist on *essential* truths that constitute the core of Biblical Christianity. As Richard Gaffin, one of my former professors, wrote, “To be sure, Paul knows, as we must know, how to distinguish between center and periphery in that gospel message with its implications and so within the whole counsel of God. We do not have to, or need not try to, say everything at once. Clearly the call to repentance and faith (20:21) for the forgiveness of sins (Luke 24:47) must always be present and prominent, as well as those matters of *first importance* in view in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4. With that said, however, within the wholeness of the whole counsel, the periphery, because peripheral, is not thereby disposable or nonessential or unimportant, for it is *integral* to the whole in the sense that without it the center ceases to be truly central. Just as periphery, it is essential, *peripherally essential*, we might say. Within the whole counsel of God, everything is necessary, but not equally necessary or necessary in the same way.”¹⁰

ENDNOTES

¹ John F. MacArthur, Jr., *Reckless Faith: When the Church Loses Its Will to Discern* (Crossway, 1994), p. 22. He adds: “When tolerance is valued over truth, the cause of truth always suffers.”

² P. G. Ryken, *Galatians: Reformed Expository Commentary* (P&R, 2005), p. 40.

³ Martin Lloyd-Jones, in commenting on Ephesians 4:14-15, made this important point, “In verse 14 Paul has given us the negative aspect. In the following verse we have his positive teaching: *Speaking the truth in love, [we] may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ*. Here again is a much-quoted text, but unfortunately it is not always quoted accurately. Frequently the emphasis is put entirely upon the *love* and not at all upon the *truth*. Indeed, the position is sometimes such that we are almost told that you cannot have the two together, and that the trouble with evangelicals is that they are so concerned about the truth that they forget the element of love. Let us be honest and admit that the charge may sometimes be true, but let us add that the sin is not one-sided. We all fail in this matter of love and charity. What the apostle is saying is not that we should avoid doctrine, or minimize doctrine, or suppress doctrine in the interests of love. What he is saying is that we should *speak the truth in love*. Indeed, it is not even just *speaking the truth*; what he actually says is much stronger. Some say that the translation should be *truthoring* it, that the whole of our life should be in terms of truth. We should have the truth, we should hold the truth, we should walk in the truth, we should speak the truth: *Truthoring it in love. Knowing The Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions, 1942-1977* (Banner of Truth, 1989), p. 147.

⁴ cf. D. Guthrie, *Galatians: The New Century Bible Commentary* (Eerdmans, 1981), p. 76.

⁵ *Machen's Notes on Galatians*, ed. J. Skilton (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1973), p. 99.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷ cf. J. B. Lightfoot, *St. Paul's Epistle to the Galatians* (Macmillan & Co., 1869), p. 109.

⁸ H. N. Ridderbos, *The Epistle of Paul to the Churches of Galatia* (Eerdmans, 1953), p. 85.

⁹ *Calvin's New Testament Commentaries XI* (Eerdmans, 1974), p. 27.

¹⁰ R. B. Gaffin, Sr., *In The Fullness of Time: An Introduction to The Biblical Theology of Acts and Paul* (Crossway, 2022), p. 243.