

OPENING ILLUSTRATION

- Show students this video of Chinese Christians seeing the Bible for the first time (<http://withinreachglobal.org/chinese-christians-bible-reactions/>). Ask students to comment on the video. What do the reactions of the Chinese Christians tell us about how they view the Word of God? At one point, one woman said, “This is what we needed the most.” Most Christians would agree with her comment, but sometimes we’re tempted to add to the gospel. “My salvation is Christ plus this or that.” But adding to the gospel only minimizes its sacredness. In Paul’s day, there was a group of Jewish Christians who were telling Gentile Christians they needed to be circumcised if they wanted to be true believers. But this was a distortion of the gospel of Christ because it added to the already finished work of Christ. Instead of trying to add to our salvation, we need to embrace the gospel just like the Chinese Christians embraced God’s Word, knowing it’s all we need.

CONTEXT

- After 14 years, Paul made another trip to Jerusalem, this time taking Barnabas and Titus with him. Paul was a great apostle, but he was also human. He needed the help and encouragement of others. These men met with James, Cephas (Peter), and John—“pillars” of the Jerusalem church. One of the issues was whether Gentile believers needed to be circumcised like their Jewish brothers. In other words, did the law still apply in this instance or did this practice compromise the gospel? The answer was clearly the latter. Together, the leaders in the church in Jerusalem agreed that Paul’s gospel—the message he had been preaching to the Gentiles—lined up with the gospel message they had been preaching to the Jews. And they were all in agreement that they must remember the poor. In other words, they were on the same page theologically.

EXPOSITORY OUTLINE

The following are suggested sermon points for each verse or section of verses for a large group setting.

- Galatians 2:1-5. *The truth of the gospel message must be preserved.* We are saved apart from works of the law, including the Jewish rite of circumcision. The freedom we enjoy in Jesus must be guarded. There was no need for Titus to get circumcised.
- Galatians 2:6-9. *God doesn’t show favoritism.* There are no celebrity Christians in God’s eyes. What matters is faithfulness to God and faithfulness to the gospel. Having influence didn’t impress Paul, and it shouldn’t impress us either.
- Galatians 2:10. *Taking care of the poor is part of gospel ministry.* While the gospel is the message of the good news of God’s grace in Jesus, it also has implications for how Christians live. One of those implications is to care for the poor—something Paul and the leaders of the church in Jerusalem were eager to do. Caring for the poor continues to be a responsibility of the church.

GROUP DISCUSSION

The following are suggested discussion questions on each verse or section of verses for leading a small group session are also useful in sermon deliveries that include discussion.

ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 2:1-5.

- **Why did Paul go back to Jerusalem? What was he hoping to accomplish?**
- **What is the relationship between law and grace? In other words, how should a Christian (who’s been saved by grace) relate to the law of God?**
- **Why is Paul so concerned with freedom in Christ? What does that even mean?**

ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 2:6-9

- **Paul said that God doesn’t show favoritism. Who is he talking about when he says that? How are you tempted to show favoritism?**
- **Paul said he was called by God’s grace. What do you think he means by that? Has God called you by His grace, too?**



- › Paul says that God is at work in him and that he has received grace for ministry. How do you think God is at work in you? How might he want to give you grace to love and serve others?

ASK A STUDENT TO READ GALATIANS 2:10.

- › How is taking care of the poor connected to spreading the gospel?
- › Why do you think the Bible has so much to say about taking care of the poor?

SESSION CONNECTION

- › In Session 3, students saw how God gave the Israelites another miraculous victory, even making the sun stand still for a time (Josh. 10:6-14). Taking the promised land required Joshua to trust God and obey Him. Joshua could not afford to give in to his fears if he was to lead the people of Israel to victory once again. By contrast, the nations surrounding Israel were controlled by fear because they didn't trust God. That principle applies on an individual level, too. Our faith will crowd out our fears, or our fears will crowd out our faith. The key to having our faith win out over our fears is to trust what God says and obey Him. When we actively trust God's Word, we can engage in the mission He has given us without fear. Paul certainly had to do that. He was focused on preserving the truth of the gospel God had revealed to him, even if that meant going against the crowd. The truth of God often confronts what is popular, so it takes courage to pronounce it and preserve it.

OBJECT LESSON/APPLICATION

- › Ask students if they've ever heard the expressions "You get what you pay for!" or "Nothing in this life is free!" Lead a discussion on how these sayings run contrary to the truth of the gospel. It's human nature to feel like we need to earn everything, especially when it comes to earning the approval of God and others. But the gospel frees us from working to earn approval. When Christ died, He completed the work of our salvation. There's nothing we can do to add or subtract from that. We no longer need to prove ourselves. Ask students what kinds of things Christians feel the need to do to earn God's approval.

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- › <http://www.relevantmagazine.com/god/practical-faith/how-should-christians-help-poor>– John D. Barry explores the manner in which followers of Christ should strive to serve those living in poverty.
- › <https://www.righnow.org/Training/Post/Preview/154248>– Don Carson unpacks 2 Timothy 1 to explain how to preserve the gospel for future generations.

** These websites are not affiliated with LifeWay. Consult with your church's leadership before including these in your session to be sure that your church's values allow their materials to be referenced in your session time.*