

Galatians 2 (Part 1): 1-5 • The Finished Work of Jesus

Teacher: Pastor Paul LeBoutillier
Life Bible Ministry

And we are in the Book of Galatians, chapter 2, and Paul is continuing to argue for the work of Jesus on the cross as a finished work. I've, ever since I started saying the finished work of Jesus on the cross, I don't even know when I started saying that, but I love saying it. I don't just like talking about the work of Jesus on the cross, I like talking about the finished work, because that's what you see Jesus did for us, that's what is being threatened in the churches of Galatia, and that's why Paul wrote this letter, was to argue for the work of Christ as a finished work, and he does that in different ways throughout this letter, and he gets pretty intense here in this chapter.

It begins by saying in verse 1,

¹ “...after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.

³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.” (ESV)

Stop there, please. Let's pray. Jesus, fill us with understanding. Guide us by your Holy Spirit, we ask it in Christ's name, amen.

The theme of the Book of Galatians is just that. Paul is saying, we're saved by trusting in Christ alone, and nothing else. Nothing added, nothing taken away. The work that He accomplished on the cross when He died bearing our punishment was, you are you ready? Enough, and there are many passages throughout the Scripture that help us to understand that emphasis.

I could fill up your day sharing them with you, but one of them that I love so much comes from the words of our Lord himself, and it's recorded for us in the Gospel, according to John, and I'd like to put it on the screen for you to see from the 19th chapter, beginning in verse 28. It says,

John 19:28-30 (ESV)

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all was now finished, said (to fulfill the Scripture), “I thirst.” (and it says) A jar full of sour wine stood there, so they put a sponge full of the sour wine on a hyssop branch and held it to his mouth. When Jesus had received the sour wine, he said, “It is finished,” and he bowed his head and gave up his spirit.”

This is a wonderful passage. But the reason that it's wonderful is because of the use of a particular word, and by the way, you know that the New Testament was written in Greek, but Jesus didn't speak in Greek. He most likely spoke this in Aramaic, but John wrote down his Gospel account in Greek, and the word that he used there, that we translate, it is finished, is just one single Greek word.

It's, tetelestai, and that is a wonderful word that the people of that day would have heard a lot. It was a word that was used in the marketplace. When somebody finished a transaction, and they paid for whatever they had purchased, they would say tetelestai, which means, paid in full. It's the same thing as you getting a receipt, paid. A person paid this. In other words, nothing else needs to be received.

Nothing else needs to be done, because this was paid in full, and it's a, wonderful statement that becomes this beautiful bedrock for us understanding the Gospel. Jesus paid it all. Now the implications of that are huge. Let me show you a great quote that I found online, I doctored it up a little bit, I can't help it.

A single word or phrase can change everything, such as hearing the words “not guilty,” in a court of law, or the words “fair” or “foul” on the playing field. When a woman says “yes” to a marriage proposal, that pretty much changes everything as can the words “no” or “goodbye.” Yet there's never been a single word in all of history that has impacted mankind more than when Jesus said, “it is finished!”

A single word or phrase can change everything, such as hearing the words “not guilty,” (I would imagine) in a court of law, or the words “fair” or “foul” on the playing field. When a woman says “yes” to a marriage proposal, that pretty much changes everything as can the words “no” or “goodbye.” Yet there's never been a single word in all of history that has impacted mankind more than when Jesus said, “it is finished!”

Though that word, and again, that's one Greek word. That word is so powerful, so all-encompassing for us to understand the Gospel, but that's the very thing that was being threatened in the churches of Galatia at the arrival of those Jewish legalists who came into the churches and began to preach that Jesus wasn't enough, and sadly the people were beginning to embrace what they were saying, and this alarmed Paul. He was very alarmed at what he heard, and so he's writing them here to convince them that the Gospel he gave them is the very same one that the leaders in Jerusalem also embraced.

That's why he's talking here in these first several verses about, I went back to Jerusalem I shared my Gospel with them so that I would make certain that I was not running my race or had not run my race in vain. What he means by that, Paul's not questioning, he's not saying, I shared my Gospel with them to make sure that what I was saying was on target.

He knew what he was saying was on target. Paul knew his Gospel was true. He received it from Jesus. He said that earlier in the letter. What he was saying was, I'm checking my Gospel to theirs to make sure they haven't strayed. You know why? We don't realize this very much, but Jerusalem was a hotbed for legalism. The church I mean, the Christian church in Jerusalem was a hotbed for legalism.

James, who was the pastor of that church, had his work cut out for him, because all of the people in the Church of Jerusalem came out of Judaism. They had been for centuries, as a people, learning about the law of Moses, the demands of the law, the covenant sign that God had given to Abraham of circumcision, and all of that was, those were non negotiables to a Jewish mind, right?

There's just no getting around it right? Now Jesus comes along, and they begin to preach that Jesus is the Savior, and their immediate thought is, well sure, he's the Savior of the Jews. And you hear, you know why He saved us? Because we're God's people. Do you know how we're God's people? Through circumcision and the keeping of the law.

You're with, yeah, right? See the progression? They never even gave any consideration that Gentiles could be saved. Are you kidding me? A Gentile?

Saved? A non-Jew? Saved? I've never heard anything so preposterous. Gentiles are dogs! That's what they called them. Pharisees used to wake up every morning and say, Oh Lord, thank you, oh God, that I'm a Jew, and I'm neither a dog or a woman. That's what they'd say.

Sorry if that offends, that's what they said, it's not what I say. That's the way they looked at Gentiles. There's no such thing as salvation. Well, when they began to open their heart to the idea that Gentiles could be saved, and you can read about that through Acts chapter 15, and they literally, at the end of that chapter, they're like, so Gentiles can be saved, who would have thunk?

And it was really a total mind blower, right, to them. But they assumed well, the only way a Gentile can be saved, because salvation is from the Jews, is to be a Jew. They've got to submit to circumcision. They've got to keep the law of Moses, and then Jesus can save them. Now, you have to understand that there were people who believed that, just because they were Jews, and they weren't necessarily false brothers.

They were just coming out of the deep freeze of Judaism and legalism. There were others who taught, you want to be saved? Get circumcised, keep the law of Moses, and then throw in a little Jesus there. And they were false brothers, and that's what Paul called them in this passage, and that's why he's saying here, after 14 years, I finally went up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles, and oh, by the way, he says, I took Titus along with me.

I love that. Remember, Titus is a Greek. What's that mean? He's not circumcised. Paul brought a test case along. I really believe it. I do. I think Paul brought Titus along to push the envelope, to poke the bear, as it were. Right? To say, I'm going to bring Titus along. He's a wonderful brother in the Lord, but I'm going to bring him to Jerusalem. The hotbed of legalism and we're going to see if they will accept him as a brother outside of circumcision.

We're going to see what's really going on here. Paul wasn't positive what he was going to find. He knew the Gospel that God had given to him. Now he goes up, again in verse 2 he says, *"I went up because of a revelation, and I sat before them, although privately"*, I didn't make a big stink about it in front of everybody.

He says, *"I did it privately before those who seemed influential,"* in other words, the leadership. He says, *"I told them the Gospel that I was proclaiming among the Gentiles, the one Jesus had given to me, in order to make sure I was not running, or had not run in vain,"* right? And by the way, this is all very possible

that this took place during that event that is given to us in the book of Acts. Chapter 15, let me put it on the screen for you, goes like this.

Acts 15:1-2 (ESV)

“But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’ And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them. Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.”

“But some men came down from Judea, (in other words, from Jerusalem) to Antioch, and were teaching the brothers, unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, (look at this), you cannot be saved. And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them...” (Isn't that a very wonderful way of saying they got real heated? It says that) *“Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and elders about this question.”*

So, I don't think Paul, these guys came from Jerusalem and we're telling people, you got to be circumcised. So, I don't know if Paul knew for sure what he was going to find when he got to Jerusalem. Again, he knew what the Gospel God had given him, but he wasn't really sure. Look what he goes on to say in verse three, because this is kind of the conclusion of the thing. He says,

³*“but even Titus who was with me was not forced to be circumcised though he was a Greek.”* And here he's saying, Okay, we did all right, because I brought my test case, I brought Titus, a man who's a Greek, a Gentile, a born again believer, and I laid him all there in front of everybody and I said, what do you guys think of Titus?

Because see, this is the Gospel that I preach, that circumcision is not necessary for salvation. That we are saved by faith, when we put our faith in Jesus Christ and, here it comes, the finished work that He did on the cross. And so, here's this big test thing. And what does he say? He says, *“Titus wasn't forced to be circumcised.”*

In other words, he was not compelled by the leaders to undergo circumcision. He reports that this is what happens and you know what he's saying by that? He's telling the people in Galatia, I took Titus to Jerusalem. These guys are telling you that this is what the apostles in Jerusalem are teaching. It's not, I took Titus there. They didn't ask him to get circumcised. They didn't demand it of him. Why are these guys coming and demanding it of you?

Now he goes on in verse 4, and he lays it out. *“They’re false brothers,”* (he says, and) *“they secretly have slipped in.”* (And he tells why) *To spy out our freedom. The freedom we have in Christ...*”

By the way, we're going to talk a lot about freedom in the coming chapters. Stay tuned. Incredible stuff as we get into the last chapters of Galatians about freedom and slavery. But he talks about these false brothers, and here's what their intention was.... *“to enslave us to the law and to the flesh”* when we've already been set free and so forth, and that influence of these men who had come from Jerusalem is so powerful.

Have you ever wondered how you would respond if somebody came in and started preaching something that was legalistic? Let me ask you this, does legalism exist today within the body of Christ and other factions of Christianity? Are you kidding? It's huge! Legalism is huge!

Let me define legalism for you. Requirements that are placed upon individuals who have put their faith in Christ, but are now being saddled with additional requirements, in order to be accepted by God, holy, righteous in His sight, and so forth.

Is that going on today? Oh, yes, indeed. And it is so incredibly powerful and it can be very subtle, too. Have you ever been in a room where there are some Christians talking and they're just discussing life and this and that, and somebody will inevitably talk about something maybe they saw on TV and, oh, did you see that program about da, da da da and there's a little bit of discussion. But then one of the individuals in the room, one of the believers will say, well, actually, I don't have a TV. I got rid of it years ago.

And immediately there's a tension in the room and sometimes we'll even backpedal a little bit. Somebody will say, well, I only watch the news. Once in a while I'll watch PBS and maybe some football. That's about all. Pray for me. God will deliver me one day from all that as well but instantly we're just , we're brought into this feeling like that was a statement of holiness.

Now, first of all, I want to say something. If God has impressed upon you the conviction to get rid of your television, God bless you. If that's what He has spoken to you about, then that's what you need to do. If He has not spoken that way to someone else, that's between them and God okay? But regardless of what the intent of that statement was when somebody said, well, I've gotten rid of my TV, I no longer have one.

Regardless of what their intention was, and sometimes it is, the intention is to be legalistic, but even if it wasn't, we are immediately drawn to that sort of a thing, where, we recognize the tension. We recognize that there's this influence of righteousness through works and we're immediately ashamed, even if we have no conviction from the Lord to get rid of our television.

We're just, we're immediately like, oh man, I'm just wondering if I'm scum here, because you just mentioned that you haven't had a TV for years, and I have one, and we even turn it on sometimes, and we watch it and stuff like that, and I'll grant you that most of what's on television is pretty trashy. Big surprise, right? Yeah, none of you are going, really?

But the point is, somebody makes a statement like that and immediately what we've heard whether intentional or not, is we've received this influence. It's the influence of righteousness through good works and everyone in the room who still has a TV suddenly feels inferior to that level of righteousness, or at least perceived righteousness.

And that's all it takes. That's all it takes is a brief statement by someone saying what they've done to make the rest of us feel like we're lesser individuals, and let me tell you something, Christians, it's a small step from there, to feeling uncomfortable about having a TV. It's a small step to move down the road and to begin to embrace other forms of righteousness by works.

And pretty soon you are open to areas like somebody coming along and telling you, if you don't keep the Sabbath, if you don't keep the food laws, if you don't do this, if you don't do that, you are not acceptable before God, and suddenly it just caves in on us and we're surrounded by this salvation by works and let me tell you something, it can happen.

Paul knew that it could happen. He was alarmed at the fact that it was beginning to happen within the churches of Galatia. And he wrote to them this letter of a very passionate appeal on his part, to think about what you're doing and where you're going with this thing because you're wanting to go back under the law. You're going to enslave yourselves once again.

That's what these men are trying to do to you, Paul writes. They're just trying, they've been, they've come in, they've slipped in among us to enslave us when we've been set free in Christ. There's a passage that Paul wrote to the Colossian Christians about legalism that's very insightful. Let me put this on the screen for you. He writes this and he says,

Colossians 2:20-23 (NIV)

"Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

Since you died with Christ to the (basic principles) of this world, (and we'll talk more about dying to Christ next time here in Galatians. But he says) why, as though you still belonged to it (meaning) the world, do you submit to its rules: "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? (He says) Theseare all destined to perish with use, (Why?) Because they are based on merely human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, (but look at this last sentence. It is critical) but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

In other words, All the legalism in the world will not make you holy. It might make you look holy in the eyes of people. I guess if you're going for an appearance, knock yourself out. Keep the Sabbath and tell everybody you know that if they're going to church on any day but Saturday, they're going to hell. Fine, if you want that appearance of holiness. The appearance only.

Or follow the food laws and tell everybody they got to do the same or tell people that they must be baptized in water or they are not saved. And by all means, tell people if they don't speak in tongues, they're not born again, because that's the junk we've added right? And some of the things, like the Sabbath, there's nothing wrong with the Sabbath day. There's nothing wrong with it.

There's nothing wrong, frankly, with water baptism. You saw that we're going to do one of those. There's nothing wrong, frankly, with spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues. There's nothing wrong with it. But when we put those things in, as a requirement for salvation, we enter into legalism. When we place anything next to Jesus and say, it's Jesus plus this, you got to do this, we've entered into legalism. You see? The whole point of this is the statement of Jesus on the cross.

It is finished! It's completed! It's done! There's nothing else you have to do. Just receive, by faith, what He did, and you will be saved. Oh, but pastor, you don't

know the kind of life I've lived. I know I don't, but I know the kind of death He died. And I know that it was enough. It was enough to wipe out your sin and that's the important part of this whole discussion. This whole situation.

If you're interested in a holiness that really means something, not just the appearance of it, but a holiness that is real. Then put your faith in Christ. Don't consider that it's something you need to do by works, good behavior, or ceremonial whatever, because you see, holiness is something that is imputed to us along with righteousness when we come to Christ.

The word, imputed means it's given to us by faith. It's not something you earn, it's just something given. Do you know the Bible calls you and I saints? You know what that means? Holy ones. You are a saint. That doesn't mean you act saintly. Okay? It means positionally, before God, you are a saint. That means you are a holy one.

That holiness did not come because you kept some rules, or kept some laws, or did things right, because for the most part, we're pretty much mess ups, aren't we? I mean, let's just face it. I am anyway. Thank you very much. And yet God calls me holy, positionally. In Christ, I'm holy, not because of anything I've done.

Not because of keeping any laws, or regulations. I'm holy in Christ by faith, because I've put my faith in His finished work. When Jesus said, it is finished, I believe Him, and that's what it comes down to, doesn't it? Do you believe that what He said on the cross is really true? It is finished. Let me tell you something when you begin to really embrace the completion of His work on the cross, that's when God begins to set you free from being on that performance track.

And there's a lot of Christians who are on a performance track with God. I got to do better, God. I promise. I promise God I'll do better. Knock that off! That is literally a performance track, and you cannot measure up to that. It's just, it's not even possible. Our righteousness, our holiness, is given to us by faith. Oh, isn't that good news? That is good news, isn't it? The rest of it is really bad news, because it's something you have to do. The good news is, He did the work, and He finished it.