

## ***A no-compromise fight for freedom*** (Galatians 2:1–5)

There is an on-going fight to maintain the gospel as a message of freedom from the bondage of sin and from the yoke of the law. It is a fight allowing no compromise. The good news can only be a proclamation of salvation in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone. Paul knew this. And although the source of his gospel was independent of the other Apostles, they were united in the content of the message and together they stood against the pressure to compromise by yielding to demands for circumcision and keeping the law. The event showing this is reported in Galatians 2:1–5.

### **1. *The occasion needing to withstand compromise: a trip to Jerusalem (2:1–2a)***

- a. The time frame, “14 years,” can be counted either from Paul’s conversion, making this visit to Jerusalem that of the so-called famine visit (Acts 11:27–30; 12:25), or it is reckoned after the visit last mentioned in chapter 1, making it that visit which resulted in the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).
- b. Paul went with Barnabas (a former benefactor and then associate of Paul), taking Titus along, who although unmentioned in Acts became a co-worker of Paul and “as a son” to him.
- c. Paul went “because of a revelation”, either that of foretelling the famine or an undisclosed revelation affirming Antioch’s decision to send a delegation to Jerusalem, but not because of any uncertainty in Paul concerning his message.

### **2. *Paul’s presentation of his gospel (2:2b)***

- a. In Jerusalem Paul “set before” them his gospel, not getting it from them.
- b. The primary issue was the content of what he proclaimed among the Gentiles.
- c. Paul presented his gospel to “those who seemed influential” (ESV), or more simply, “those of reputation”, which were probably James, Peter, and John (cf. 2:9).
- d. Paul’s intent, “lest by any means I might run or had run in vain” (AV), could not have contained doubt about his message (cf. 1:8–9). It is more likely he was uncertain of the response he would receive, and therefore chose a private context, so that an unsupportive (and wrong) response would not undermine his ministry among Gentiles.

### **3. *The response from those of reputation (2:3–5)***

But the response of those of reputation was fully supportive of Paul and his gospel, and that is seen in the refusal to circumcise Titus (2:3).

- a. Titus, as a Greek, would not normally have been circumcised. The refusal to change that confirmed that circumcision was not necessary for salvation. Salvation in Christ is by grace alone through faith alone.
- b. The pressure to circumcise had come from false brethren, i.e., those claiming to be Christian but who were not truly born again. They had been brought into the fellowship of the church under false pretenses, having the right answers to questions about their faith. But the issue of circumcision revealed that they did not truly belong (cf. 1 John 2:19). Their efforts were like that of spies, concealing their true identity while trying to overthrow the doctrine of grace, and effectively returning believers into bondage, the “yoke” of the law (Acts 15:10–11).

In Christ Jesus believers are set free. To require circumcision or keeping of the law in order to be right with God is bondage, enslaving the person to a system that requires obedience to the whole law. Christ sets the believer free from sin and the law to enable them to serve others in love (5:13).

- c. The Christian leaders at Jerusalem did not yield even for a moment to this pressure, because they understood that sinful people could become right with God in Jesus Christ by grace alone through faith alone. Circumcision and the whole Mosaic system of rules and regulations which it represented could be set aside. The gospel is not Christ plus something, it is Christ alone.

Paul fought and preserved the truth of the gospel for Gentile believers. He won that battle to keep the good news truly good news. It is important to fight against any such pressures to compromise the gospel, which can come from various directions and take various forms. Study God’s Word and grow in discernment so that you might never let go of the good news that salvation is in Christ alone by grace alone through faith alone.

### ***Questions for further thought and discussion:***

- Where do you see the potential pressures to compromise on the gospel?
- If you have ever hesitated in sharing the gospel, what caused that hesitation? Did it involve anything which you believed the other person might find offensive or foolish?
- What most encourages you to continually sharpen your understanding of the gospel and proclaim it clearly, even if it is viewed as offensive or foolish?