



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Galatians 2: 1-10

Spring 2021

"The Brave Three"

TRANSCRIPT

Thank you Seth, and good morning to all of you. *(I) Like that Pink quote, (Seth).* Arthur Pink is a great writer and someone worth reading. In that statement, "You can't know God's will if you don't know God's Word", that's why we're here—to learn about the LORD and to learn about His will. And we're doing that in the Book of Galatians and our study takes us now to chapter 2. And we're going to look at verses 1 through 10. So I will read those ten verses and then we'll pray.

2 Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. ² It 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. ³ But not even Titus, who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴ But *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. ⁵ But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you. ⁶ But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. ⁷ But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter *had been* to the

circumcised ⁸ (for He who effectually worked for Peter in *his* apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), ⁹ and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we *might go* to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ *They only asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.

Galatians 2: 1-10

(Message) There's an old Roman legend, the story of "Horatius at the Bridge". Paul would have been familiar with it. It tells how Horatius and two friends held off an invading army on one side of the river, while the citizens of Rome chopped down the Tiber bridge to save the city from destruction. Just before the bridge fell, Horatius sent his two friends back and stood alone against the enemy. When the city was safe, he leapt into the river, wounded, and swam to safety. He saved Rome. The English poet, Thomas Macaulay, retold the story in an epic poem. In his version he called the soldiers at the bridge "The Brave Three".

Galatians 2:1-10 is Paul's account of what we might call 'The Brave Three'; Paul, Barnabas, and Titus, who went up to Jerusalem and held off a powerful enemy of the Gospel. Paul wrote, "...we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour..." (vs5). They alone delivered the church from an invasion of the "false brethren", as Paul calls them. It is a story Paul tells in order to show that the apostles were united with him in the Gospel that he preached. Contrary to what the Judaizers had said, Paul was not a rogue apostle who developed a message different from the one authorized by Jerusalem. Paul and the 12 apostles were united in the Gospel.

So this event in Jerusalem, that he records in chapter 2, is one of the most important events—one of the decisive battles—in the history of the church. It was Paul's first confrontation with men who demanded that ceremonies, or human works, must be added to the Gospel for salvation. He knew how important this matter was. And so he

begins the chapter in verse 1 and verse 2 by stating that 'he went up to Jerusalem' and submitted to the leaders there the Gospel that he preached "among the Gentiles".

There's some question about when Paul went up to Jerusalem. The Book of Acts mentions two visits that he made there with Barnabas, the famine "relief" visit, as it's called in Acts chapter 11, and the visit in Acts chapter 15, to the 'Council of Jerusalem'. In Acts 15 you have an event that's very attractive as a possibility for the visit that Paul speaks of here, because the leaders of the church dealt decisively with the very issue that Paul was dealing with there in Galatia—this issue of circumcision and faith.

The problem with seeing that as the visit that Paul is referring to here is the issue was settled there at that council, at the Jerusalem Council. So if Galatians was written after the events of Acts 15, then Paul could very easily have settled the dispute there in Galatia by telling them that this has already been resolved and the apostles had sided with him.

So since he doesn't do that, it's better to identify this visit in Galatians 2 with the visit in Acts 11, 'the famine relief visit', which was early in Paul's ministry. He writes that he went up to Jerusalem "after an interval of 14 years" (vs1). He's probably referring to the 14 years after his conversion. So roughly 11 years after his first visit there, when he met with Peter and James, he went up again. And this time he went with Barnabas and Titus.

Barnabas was a leader in the church. He was a Levite from Cyprus. His real name was Joseph, but he was given the name Barnabas, which means 'Son of Encouragement'; and he was certainly that—he was an encouragement to Paul. When Paul first came to Jerusalem after his conversion everyone was afraid of him, as you can imagine they would be. He had been the great persecutor of the church there in Jerusalem. It was Barnabas who took Paul under his wing and introduced him to Peter, and calmed people's fears about him.

Later, when the apostles sent Barnabas to oversee the ministry in Antioch, this church that was basically a Gentile church and was growing exponentially, when

Barnabas was sent there, he went to Tarsus and brought Paul back to Antioch to help him in that very big and important ministry. While they were there, the prophet Agabus came up to the church and prophesied that there would be a great famine all over the world. And so the saints in Antioch took up a collection for the Christians in Judea. And they sent Paul and Barnabas to take up this gift to Jerusalem.

In verse 2 Paul states that it was because of a revelation that he went up. Now that may refer to the prophecy of Agabus. More likely though, it is a private revelation that he's referring to. The significance of this was Paul did not go up to Jerusalem on instructions from the apostles. He was independent of them as an apostle in his own right. He was under the authority of Christ and it was under the LORD's direction that he and Barnabas went to Jerusalem.

And they took Titus with them. Titus was a Gentile believer who was converted under Paul's ministry, probably from Antioch, and a man who would have a long ministry with the apostle Paul. He was an uncircumcised Gentile—and saved. And Paul likely took him to Jerusalem to be a test case for the Gospel; and to demonstrate that circumcision was not necessary for salvation.

Paul wrote that when he arrived in Jerusalem, he submitted his Gospel of salvation by faith alone, in Christ alone, to the leaders in the church. He identified them in verse 9 as James, Peter, and John, and said 'he submitted his Gospel to them in private', "...for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain." (vs2). Now he wasn't afraid that he had preached the wrong Gospel and wanted their evaluation of what he'd been preaching. He'd been preaching for at least 14 years with amazing results. Titus was an example of his preaching.

His concern was that they recognize, officially, the Gentile converts of his ministry as genuine Christians and as part of the church. His concern was to avoid a schism or a rupture in the church that would divide the church into two churches effectively—a Gentile church and a Jewish church. He wanted unity—the one church. So he met privately, met discretely.

Circumcision was a sensitive issue. Many Jews in the church felt very strongly about it. It was, as you know, the sign of the Abrahamic covenant. The Law required it of all Jewish males and of male Gentile converts. For nearly 2000 years, Israelite men had been circumcised. As a result, even though Christ had fulfilled the Law so that the ceremonies of the Law were no longer binding, still, many Jewish believers had difficulty letting go of them.

So to avoid a heated discussion that would damage his ministry, Paul presented his Gospel to the church leaders knowing that he would get a friendly hearing from them. And he got that. They accepted Titus as saved. But in doing this, Paul did not avoid the trouble that he had hoped to avoid. It came from a group that Paul calls in verse 4, "false brethren". These men learned that Titus was a Gentile, learned that he was uncircumcised, and may even have intruded into Paul's meeting with the apostles to demand that Titus be circumcised.

They were evidently men of some standing in the church, men who passed as Christians, and were believed by most to be genuine believers—but who Paul calls "false". In his eyes they were counterfeits. They opposed grace. They wanted to rob Gentile converts of the freedom the Gospel gave them. That freedom meant nothing to these men. Paul described them as men "...who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage". (vs4).

They approached the apostles as true believers, as defenders of the faith, as men who were zealous for God's Word and truth. But Paul reveals the true nature and the true condition of these men—they were traitors. He describes them as 'spies' who had infiltrated the church in an attempt to capture it for a very different master.

This description of them as 'false brethren' secretly brought in is also used by Peter in 2 Peter, chapter 2, verse 1, where we are told by him of those who "secretly introduce destructive heresies" to ruin the church. That's the way the enemy works. The enemy is clever; the enemy works by stealth—by intrigue. They don't enter a church as enemies, just as the devil doesn't reveal himself as a serpent—as a dragon. He doesn't reveal himself as a "liar" and a "murderer" from the beginning, as Jesus described him,

(John 8:44). No, he comes as an 'angel of light', Paul tells us. And the false brethren posed as friends; they posed as defenders of the faith. They are an example of how false teachers work, how they win over people. They do it, as it were, with a mask on, hiding their real identity. They're there to serve, they're there to help. They may be very winsome and intelligent individuals, and have a winning kind of personality. But their real goal, Paul says, was to bring believers into bondage, bring them under the yoke of the Law and enslave them to its rules and regulations—to take away their freedom.

Later Paul writes, in chapter 5 verse 3, that "...every man who receives circumcision...is under obligation to keep the whole Law." The Law is like a seamless garment. You can't take one part without taking the other. You can't embrace one part of the Law without embracing the entire Law. And that is what these men wanted to do. They wanted to bring the church under the whole Law, and establish it, (establish the Law), as the basis of salvation rather than God's grace and His work in His Son, Christ. They wanted to make the Law the regulative controlling principle in people's lives.

The Judaizers were trying to do the same thing in Galatia. What these men in Jerusalem earlier had tried to do, these men in Galatia were trying to do. That's the reason Paul will tell the Galatians in chapter 5 verse 1, "It was for freedom that Christ set us free; therefore, keep standing firm..."

Well that's what Paul and Barnabas did, and Titus. Just as those old Romans defending the bridge and the city of Rome did—these three stood firm. And what they resisted must have been a forceful argument from this group of Jewish scholars and advocates of the Law and circumcision because they made their argument from the Law of Moses. They made their argument from Scripture. And very likely they made their argument also from history—how Jews had suffered martyrdom for circumcision in the days of the Maccabees.

Well nevertheless, Paul says in verse 5, "We did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel would remain with you." Paul was not a narrow minded, stubborn person. In fact just the opposite—he was broad-minded, he

was a gracious and accommodating person. He told the Corinthians that 'He became all things to all men, to those under the Law, as under the Law, to those without the Law, as one without Law, so that I may win more.' (1 Cor 9:20-22). Now that's Christian freedom, and that's the Christian goal, to win more.

In fact, when he took Timothy on his second missionary journey, he had him circumcised so that he would not be an offense to the Jews. It would be very difficult to take Timothy into the synagogues where Paul would usually begin his ministry when he went into a city and he was not circumcised. And so that he would not be a difficulty in that regard, that he would not be an offense to the Jews, he had him circumcised. He did it to promote the Gospel. Since we're not under the Law, we are not obligated to circumcision. But we are free to do it, if doing it will remove an unnecessary obstacle to evangelism in the Gospel. So, the decision to circumcise Timothy had to do with missionary strategy, not with the terms of salvation in the Gospel.

With Titus it was different. Paul knew that in his case, the essence of the Gospel was at stake. Not only for those in Jerusalem but for people everywhere—for those Galatians that Paul had not even met at that time, and for us as well. And so, this is where Paul drew his 'line in the sand'. This was 'the bridge' that the three defended—the bridge between God and man. And because they did, some unity in the church was lost but the Gospel was preserved and grace triumphed for all of us—all over the world and down across the ages.

British historian, Sir Edward Creasy wrote a book, published in 1851, titled *Fifteen Decisive Battles of the World*. The first one was the battle of Marathon between Greece and Persia. The Greek generals debated whether they should go to war because Persia had the mightiest army in the world at that time—a huge army. And they were divided somewhat as to whether they should go to battle. But the historian wrote that the result of the decision of the Greeks to fight was not merely the fate of two armies, but the whole future progress of civilization.

Paul's decision to fight the good fight in Jerusalem was one of the decisive battles of the church, one of the decisive battles of the world on which the whole future

progress of the Gospel depended. That was the magnitude of this moment in Jerusalem. Paul made a courageous stand, and one that put him against a powerful enemy.

But it was not a confrontation, not a battle that is unique. Every generation fights these battles. Every local church must contend for the faith and defend the Gospel. And it is always, always, under attack and often by the most unsuspecting kinds of people—moral, admirable people.

The issue Paul dealt with in Jerusalem in the first century is what separated Luther and Pope Leo X in the 16th century, and triggered the Reformation. At the Council of Trent a number of years later, during what is known as the 'Counter Reformation', the church of Rome declared, "If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in divine mercy, which remits sin for Christ's sake alone," (*it's that word 'alone' that's key there*), "let him be anathema." —accursed. In other words, if anyone believes that salvation is through faith alone, in Christ alone, by grace alone, let him be accursed. But that's justification. And Luther said, "Justification is the doctrine on which the church stands or falls."

Paul believed that. It's the reason he and the others stood firm for justification by faith alone—it is the Gospel. Faith plus the sacraments is the same as faith plus circumcision, no different from faith plus baptism—what Paul calls 'a different gospel', and why he wrote Galatians, and why he fought against that. "But we did not yield in subjection to them for one hour." (vs5).

Well, we must do the same, unpopular as that may be. And if we really love those of a different persuasion, we will explain these things graciously and clearly when we have the opportunity. Paul did that, along with Barnabas and Titus.

It, no doubt, cost them friends in Jerusalem. In fact, some of those very people may have come to Galatia spreading lies about the apostle. But he and his friends held their ground on this crucial issue of circumcision. They refused to let go of the Gospel. And they didn't stand alone in this. The apostles stood with them.

That's the point that Paul was making in all of this and it's the point that he makes as the passage draws to a close in the remaining verses—they gave official

recognition to his ministry. In verse 9 he states that they gave him “the right hand of fellowship.” And in verse 6 he said that they “contributed nothing to me”, (or they ‘added nothing to him’), meaning that they added nothing to his ministry. They contributed nothing to it because there was nothing to add to it. It was complete. It was sound from the beginning. The apostles agreed with Paul. His Gospel was their Gospel. That is the point that Paul is making in all of this.

But before making that point, Paul first gave a kind of disclaimer about his relationship to the apostles and his reason for referring to them. He calls them men “of high reputation”. And they were—they were that. They were men of high reputation, and they were men of high reputation among the saints in Jerusalem. But then he added that their standing made no difference to him. In other words, he wasn't appealing to the apostles because of their high standing, as though he needed that association. That's what the Judaizers had done when they visited Galatia. They used the prestige of the apostles to enhance their position. They had come to the churches, ‘dropping names’ so to speak, to add to their authority—or really, to give authority that they didn't have.

Paul wasn't doing that. He was an equal with the apostles and he didn't need their prestige to enhance his position. He adds, "God shows no partiality." God was not more favorable toward the 12 because they walked with Jesus in His earthly ministry, than He is toward Paul. Paul was as much an apostle in God's eyes, as were Peter and John. And the message he preached was true regardless of what men said. His sole reason for referring to the leaders in Jerusalem was to state that they had agreed with him about the Gospel and they were unified with him—not with those Judaizers. And they recognized Christ had given him a mission to the Gentiles—just as the LORD had given Peter a mission to the Jews. And the Spirit was working as effectually in him, in Paul, as He was in Peter.

So he says they gave to him and Barnabas “the right hand of fellowship”, which was a public recognition that they were partners in the same cause—they were partners in the cause of Jesus Christ sharing the same message. It was agreed that Paul and

Barnabas would minister mainly to the Gentiles and that they, the 12, would minister mainly to the Jews.

I say mainly, because, as you know, Paul's pattern of ministry was to go to a city, and the first place he'd go, generally, was to the synagogue, where he would have an opportunity to preach. And he would preach to the Jew first and then to the Greek. And after they invited him to leave the synagogue and not return, he would go to the Gentiles and preach to them. So it wasn't exclusively a ministry to the Gentiles, and not the Jews—and in Peter's case, as well. He preached to Cornelius, the Gentile up in Caesarea. So generally though, Paul went to the Gentiles. Generally Peter and the other apostles went to the Jews, but they also preached to others as well. It's what God called them to do and they recognized God's calling in the case of the apostle Paul.

Now a few things to notice here. First, the apostles recognized Paul's calling as the apostle and missionary to the Gentiles by the fruit of his ministry. Titus was proof of it. And Barnabas testified to it. Paul's understanding of God's Word was proof of it as well. He clearly understood, with great conviction, the essence of the Gospel. And he understood it from the Word of God. After 14 years of ministry the evidence of Paul's gifts and calling were clear to the apostles—and unimpeachable, no one could question them.

I think that brings up a practical point for us, and that is, we should not be anxious for recognition by men. Paul wasn't. We should be faithful to the LORD, and leave the results to Him, as Paul did. People will see it, and the LORD will honor it, as He did for Paul.

Secondly, good results in ministry, as in life, are divinely produced. I often make the statement that Christian life is a supernatural life. Well, it certainly is. And it's God who produces the right results in our life. The apostles recognized God was working in Paul just as He was in Peter. Verse 8, "He who effectually worked for Peter...worked for me." Well that's sovereign grace. We are responsible to do the right thing. We are responsible to act, and we are responsible to serve, but we can only do that, we can only

have the right incentive to do it, and we can only succeed in doing it because God is at work in us.

Later, in chapter 5, Paul speaks of "the fruit of the Spirit", and lists the virtues that comprise it; love, joy, peace, patience, kindness—nine virtues in all. But they're supernaturally produced. They are the fruit of the Spirit—not the fruit of our effort, (though effort certainly is involved). So, to have them, to have those virtues, we must look to the LORD. We must be obedient to the LORD—but we must draw close to Him if we're to bear fruit. We must walk by the Spirit, as Paul will exhort the Galatians later in chapter 5 verse 16.

Grace is not only about freely receiving God's blessing. It's about the results of that as well. It is about change. It is about being what we should be. It is about gladly doing what God would have us to do. It is about becoming like Christ. And we do, and we will as we yield to our LORD and we follow Him, and we look to Him, as we walk by the Spirit.

The Gospel is justification by faith alone, apart from the works of the Law. But, faith that is real, that is saving faith, is a faith that acts. It's a faith that obeys. It is never a faith without works. That is a proof of the reality of the very Gospel we proclaim—it works. The faith of the believer works. The reformers had a good way of putting this. They used to say, "We are saved by faith alone, but not by a faith that is alone." If there is life in the tree there will be fruit—and real faith works.

Christians care for one another. And that concern, the concern for others, the concern for God's people, is something that James, Peter, and John expressed to Paul and Barnabas at the end of their meeting. We read in verse 10, "*They only asked* us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do." In other words, the only instruction they gave Paul was something that he was already doing. He'd come up to Jerusalem with a gift for famine relief. He came up to Jerusalem out of concern for the poor brethren there in Jerusalem and Judea.

So even on this point Paul was not under the direction of the leaders in Jerusalem. They acknowledged him as their equal, their partner, and they agreed with his Gospel of grace. It was their Gospel as well—there's only one Gospel.

Finally, they were all in agreement that the Christian life is a life of active faith. It sacrifices whatever is necessary to do what's right. It sacrifices money or time or effort for others where it sees a need. And that won't save you. But if you're saved, you will be like that.

Later, in chapter 6, verse 2, Paul tells the Galatians, "Bear one another's burdens, and thereby fulfill the law of Christ." Then he goes on in verses 9 and 10 to write, "Let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we will reap if we do not grow weary. So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are the household of faith."

In other words, genuine faith is faith that works. It doesn't save us, but it's the product of a genuine changed life—of the life of faith. And so what we've been encouraged to do there by Paul at the end of the Book of Galatians is don't waste time. Don't miss opportunities that God gives you to help others and to have a ministry to others—to bear their burdens. Be like Christ to them. That's an active, Christian life. That's a vital Christian life.

So then, we are saved by faith alone, but not a faith that is alone. True faith loves others. That is the faith that we are to fight for. Faith in Christ, faith that we have by grace, faith that simply receives the finished work of Jesus Christ, and a faith that galvanizes us to be a minister to others, to the unbeliever, and especially to the believer, we are to defend the truth and we're to live the life. May God help us to do that in this generation, this very dark generation.

But to do that, we need to know the truth, the truth that's stated here, in this passage and throughout this book.

Do you know the truth? Do you understand the Gospel that Paul and Barnabas and Titus defended? Have you trusted in Christ? It's very simple. We're all sinners,

separated from God. But God has acted decisively to bring us to Himself, to reconcile us. And He did that through His Son, His eternal Son, the LORD Jesus Christ.

Christ died for sinners. He suffered our punishment in our place. And all who believe in Him are forgiven. They are saved, they are reconciled to God, they are brought into His family as His children, and they are given forgiveness and eternal life and made heirs of the glory to come.

If you've not believed in Christ, look to Him. Believe in Him and live for Him. God help us to do that. Let's close in a word of prayer.

Father, we do thank You for this record of Paul's life, this incident that occurred which, as we look at it from the vantage point of history, was one of the decisive battles of history—it was crucial for those in Jerusalem and Judea, for those in Antioch, for those that Paul would lead to You through his ministry in Galatia—for men and women, young and old, down through the ages. For us he defended the Gospel and succeeded by Your grace. We are pleased, Father, that he did and that he did that through Your power—that You did it. And we thank You for raising up men like those three who stood for us, who stood for the truth. And we pray that we, too, will be like that. We will understand the truth. We will hold firmly to it. And we will be men and women who influence those around us for the truth for the Gospel. We can do that through Your strength, and we pray for that.

Lord as we turn now to the last phase of our meeting this morning, the Lord's Supper, we pray that You prepare our hearts for that. And we pray these things in Christ's name. Amen.

(End of Audio)