

“The Best Defense”

Galatians 2:1-10

¹Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ²I 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. ³But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek. ⁴Yet 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—⁵to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸(for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (ESV)

The six month period of May to November 2008 was one of the most miserable times of my life. The reason it was one of the most miserable times of my life is because that was when the Presidential election was heating up. Politics was all over the place. I would get letters and people would say, “Here’s how you can tell people to vote to the Republican,” or “Here’s how you can preach that you should vote for the Democrat.” I developed this sickness that on one hand I hated politics, and on the other hand I couldn’t help but watch it all the time. People wanted to know, “Are you an ‘R’ or are you a ‘D’?” “I’m a IJWBLA “I Just Want to Be Left Alone.”” That’s it! In the midst of all that, there was one thing that brought me a great amount of encouragement. I was up late at night (often I don’t sleep well), and I happened to watch the movie, “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington.” Have you seen that movie? You need to. The statute of limitations is over. It was made in 1939 so if you haven’t seen it yet you need to get with the program. In 1939 Frank Capra made this movie, “Mr. Smith Goes to Washington,” and Jimmy Stewart was the perfect Mr. Smith playing this completely naive, sort of hayseed who was going to Washington. He was completely an idealist. He was a GEE-WHIZ kind of guy. As he was riding the bus into Washington, D.C., he was looking at the monuments and there were tears in his eyes because he couldn’t believe what a great country we live in. He had these great plans. He was going to start a boy’s ranch somewhere in the West. We’re never told what state he comes from. But very quickly he learns that many of the Senators, not all but many (if not most), are completely crooked and spend all of their days trying to scheme and maneuver and manipulate and deal with the system not caring a whit for what the people think. Mr. Smith is just shocked. They want to build a dam on the place where he’s going to build this boy’s ranch. So Mr. Smith decides he’s going to filibuster. If you remember the movie, it was like an old-school filibuster, too. It was where one guy stood up and talked for twenty, thirty, or forty hours. As soon as you stopped talking it was over and they had to vote. If you remember, he does everything to keep talking. He actually reads (in a movie) all of I Corinthians 13 just to keep going. At some point toward the end they’re about to expel from the Senate and he passes out. The Senator who was the most conniving feels guilty and confesses everything, and Mr. Smith is exonerated and the boys get their ranch and everything’s great. That’s not what encouraged me about the movie. What encouraged me about the movie was watching this movie made in 1939 and seeing how crooked and disgusting all the politicians were. Why would that encourage me? Because I look back and I say, “They were crooked back then. They were manipulative back then and we got through it as a country, so in spite of anything I think about politicians now, we’re probably going to make it through.” Looking back at that movie and seeing actually the bad part encouraged me.

Now, what does that have to do with Galatians? When you read the letters of the apostle Paul, just the very fact that there are letters from the apostle Paul should encourage you whenever you get frustrated with church. You think, “Man, church is a messed-up place. It’s full of sinners.” You know, all the clichés. But the only reason Paul wrote any of his letters is because the church is really a hard and frustrating place to be oftentimes. If the church wasn’t a hard place to be, if the church didn’t struggle with issues like self-righteousness and sin, and other things, Paul would never have had to write a letter. At times when I think, “Man, what am I doing here at church?” You read the apostle Paul and you see in his life and ministry a lot of

the very same issues. And you know what? God has seen the church through for two thousand years. So the fact that our church or any church has particular issues, only shows we're going to make it. You can look back and see. Not only that, but God has promised.

Remember the Book of Galatians, at the end of the day, is really only about two things. It's about one thing and then a sub-thing. The big thing that it's about is simply the gospel. That's it: Jesus plus anything equals nothing. Some people came into Galatia, apparently, and said, "You know, I know Paul said you need to trust Jesus, and that's a good thing. You need to trust Jesus, but you also need to be circumcised." Or, "You also need to keep this law or that law." Paul heard this and began to address them. They also said, "And besides, who is Paul after all? He's not one of the big twelve. He's like number thirteen, and we all know that's bad luck. Why would you listen to Paul?" So Paul writes this very sharp letter to the Galatians. Remember it's the only letter he writes where he doesn't open up by saying, "I thank God for you." When the apostle Paul doesn't thank God for you, you are in trouble. He spends the first chapter defending the fact that he is an apostle and that he got his gospel not from men but from God, and stating the fact that there is only one gospel. Paul said, "I don't care what any of you guys say about the gospel. If an angel tells you something different may he be accursed. If I tell you something different may I be accursed. If anyone else comes and tells you something different, accursed." Paul's pretty clear. Last week he gave us his resume to show us that he couldn't have gotten his gospel from anyone else. We talked about the fact that he became a Christian on the road to Damascus and then afterward went for three years into the desert, into Arabia somewhere. After three years he went to Jerusalem for two weeks, met Peter, and after two weeks he took off and was gone for fourteen years as we find out in this text. So whatever gospel he's preaching, he couldn't have gotten it from Peter, James, and John. So what's he going to talk about now? In the last chapter he talked about his own validation as an apostle. This chapter, at least in the beginning, he talks about how the apostles themselves validated his gospel.

We're going to look at three things today. The first thing is Paul's companions. The second thing is Paul's stubbornness or mule-headedness. The last thing is Paul's validation, or the validation of his mission. Let's look first at Paul's companions in verse 1.

¹Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. (ESV)

In the first verse Paul mentions two companions, yet they couldn't be more different. The first one he says, "After fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas." That's no big deal. Barnabas was Jewish and not only was he Jewish, but his real name was Joseph, and the apostles (we think) nicknamed him "Barnabas" which means "son of encouragement." Eventually they put him over all the churches in Antioch, and that's where the apostle Paul was brought in. At some point the apostle Paul was Barnabas' assistant pastor. At some point their roles switched, but Barnabas was the one who brought Paul in. He introduced him to the apostles. Jewish, circumcised, kosher, he's good to go. Paul says, "I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas." Then the next line is pretty interesting because he says, "taking Titus along with me." Why is that important? In other words, why didn't he say, "I went up to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus"? Because Paul is making a point here. "I went with Barnabas." That would have been natural. Paul and Barnabas, they're a team. But he says, "I took Titus along with me." In other words, "I made a proactive decision to take Titus with me. Imagine you're Titus, a new convert, a Gentile, you're somewhere in Antioch and Paul says, "Hey, Titus, I know you're not circumcised but I'd like you to take a trip with me into the bowels of Judaism." "Do I have to go?" "Yeah, you've got to go." "Aaa, I'm good. I think I'll just hang out here." "You've got to go." Paul makes a decision to take Titus along with him. Why did Paul do that? People differ on their opinions. If you want my opinion, Paul's trying to pick a fight.

It's like the movie "Braveheart." Remember the first fight scene where the Scottish Lords are aligned with their horses? Mel Gibson has a horse, too. They're going to trot out and parlay with the British and negotiate how the Lords are going to be taken care of and the people are going to get nothing. William Wallace starts taking off to ride out to where they're parlaying in the middle of this battlefield. His friend said, "Where are you going, William?" He looks back and says, "I'm going to pick a fight." He goes out there and picks a fight with the British because he wants to assert his freedom and his

independence. You don't get your freedom and independence by talking about it. Why did Paul bring Titus? For the same reason.

You see, oftentimes leaders sit in a Session meeting, or a Deacon's meeting, or a Trustee's meeting and talk about theoretical subjects, for example. Let's just pull one out of the air: divorce. So you're sitting there as a Session. You say, "What should our position on divorce be?" You talk about it and one guy will think this and someone else will think that, but as soon as a couple whose marriage is struggling is sitting in front of you, it changes everything. In other words it doesn't change the arguments, but it sort of purifies your thoughts. It's one thing to talk about theology and theological issues in the abstract; it's quite a different thing when there is a live human being who will be affected sitting in front of you. It makes you think about it just that much more clearly. So Paul could have gone to Jerusalem by himself and they could have had a theoretical discussion. Paul could have said, "You know, I'm not asking guys to be circumcised." Then the apostles would have said, "Well, gosh, you know, it probably would be good if they were." But by bringing Titus and putting him right in the middle of everything, a decision would have had to be made. "We either circumcise him or we don't circumcise him. What's it going to be, boys?" Imagine if you're Titus in the middle with big beads of sweat on your forehead because it would have affected his life. So Paul's companions were chosen, I think, very carefully.

One thing you need to notice in chapter 2 is that Paul is still maintaining his independence. Did you notice why he went up to Jerusalem? Look at verse 2.

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. (ESV)

In one sentence he tells us both why he went up to Jerusalem and what didn't compel him. He says, "I went to Jerusalem because of a revelation." We don't know what it was. Some people think it was the prophecy that Agabus gave him about a famine in Jerusalem. We really don't know what it was. The point is, Paul doesn't say, "I went to Jerusalem because I was summoned." Peter didn't say, "Paul, you need to get over here so we can check out your gospel." Paul says, "I went to Jerusalem because of a revelation. I felt God leading me to Jerusalem. While I was there I laid before those who seemed influential the gospel that I proclaim."

Now, you're going to notice that four times in this text Paul never says, "the apostles." He never throws them a bone. He always says, "I went before those who seemed influential – those who seemed like they had some influence – those who seemed to be in charge." Is Paul ditching the apostles? He's really not. Apparently those who came in and opposed him in Galatia were name droppers, so they would come in and say, "Well, Peter says we ought to be doing this or that." Or, "James says we ought to be doing this or that." It's sort of like in the current church. Someone might say, "Well, John Calvin says you should be doing this in worship," and someone else would say, "Well, Luther said it really doesn't matter." Paul says, "You know, they seemed influential. They were nothing. They seemed like they were in charge and I laid my gospel before them." You can't catch it in the English translation. He doesn't say, "The gospel that I proclaim" but the force of it is "the gospel that I still proclaim." In other words, "The gospel that I still proclaim to you, Galatians, is the one I laid down before them. The reason I did it was to make sure that I had not run the race in vain." Again, this is a very hard text to parse through. He's not saying, "I went and laid it before them to see if I wasted the past fourteen years of my life." He had preached for fourteen years. It would be a better translation to say, "I laid it before them to assure you that I have not been running the race in vain." "To assure anyone who would ask that I have not been wasting my time." He went before them to give him a "thumbs up" or a "thumbs down." That whole thumbs up or thumbs down would revolve around what they said about Titus. So those are Paul's companions.

The next thing you see is Paul's mule-headedness. In the Ancient Near East obviously they didn't have word processors and computers and things like that, so you couldn't be writing and then have a thought and write it somewhere else and then cut and paste it back in. You wrote and if something came to your mind that you wanted to make sure that you didn't forget I guess you just kept writing. So in Galatians you have a lot of that. Paul will start talking and then he'll seem to take a side

road and then he'll come back to what he was saying. Let me show you what I mean by that. At the end of verse two he says, "I laid the gospel before those who seemed influential in order to make sure that I was not running nor had run in vain." Then the most logical thing would be to skip down to verse six. "And from those who seemed influential, they added nothing to me." But he adds three verses in the middle there that are sort of a side note but they are actually the key to the whole text. That's where you see his stubbornness. Notice what he says in verse three.

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)*

So he basically gives them the end of the story at the beginning. "I took Titus along with me." The first thing that would come to your mind if you were a Galatian would be, "Well, what happened to Titus?" Paul tells you immediately. "Even Titus, who is a Gentile, was not forced to be circumcised." Now here's the irony of this whole thing. If the Judaizer, the sort of Pharisee in the crowd, had not demanded that Titus be circumcised, Paul very might have had him circumcised. He had Timothy circumcised at another time. Paul could have made the case, "Titus, we're going into the bowels of Judaism, into Jerusalem. You know, if you're circumcised it will just make my life a lot easier. It isn't an issue with salvation, so why don't we just go ahead and do it and if anyone asks we can say, 'Yes'?" I don't know how people would tell if you were circumcised or not, frankly. But apparently they could somehow. As soon as someone demanded that Titus be circumcised Paul said, "No." If you think that they didn't demand it, let me read to you Acts 15:1 to tell you exactly what the false teachers said, at least in Antioch.

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." (ESV)

So that is what people said. You can imagine these people coming into (the language Paul uses is interesting) these meetings and making the case that he needs to be circumcised in order to be saved. As soon as they said that, Paul said, "Absolutely not." For that moment, Titus, if he had struggled with Pharisees, had to think they were his favorite people at that point because the fact that they went in and demanded his circumcision caused Paul to say, "Absolutely not."

Is Paul against circumcision? You never see Paul preaching against circumcision, by the way. Circumcision is neither here nor there. He tells Timothy to be circumcised. Circumcision in and of itself is not bad. It's only bad when you add it as something that must be added in order for you to be saved. Circumcision in and of itself is not bad, but as soon as you say, "Jesus plus circumcision," it's bad. We all do that with rules and our life. The people who were trying to enforce this, who were trying to push this (and I've said this before to you) in their own mind and in their own eyes were well intentioned. In their own mind they thought, "We're just trying to square away these guys." They probably have every good intention in the world. They probably thought, "You know, what would be pleasing to God is if we get these guys circumcised because it's the mark of the covenant." They were well intentioned, yet you know what Paul calls well intentioned people who are on the wrong track? He calls them false brothers. In other words, your intentions are not what matters. What you teach and what you believe is what matters. Paul calls them false brothers. How does he call them false brothers? Notice what he said in verse four.

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. (ESV)*

The language there is very interesting. Where he says, "they slipped in" that's the word "infiltrated." They somehow snuck in or wormed their way into our meeting. Not only did they get there, the word "spy out" means to spy out with sinister intent. It's sort of like Pharisaical black ops [secret operations] Their whole purpose of them being in there, and the whole purpose of them trying to impose circumcision is in order to enslave people. They are more concerned that people obey their

laws than they are that people obey the gospel. Paul says, “They came to spy out our freedom.” Does that mean we’re free to do whatever we want? Absolutely not. It means we’re free from the works of the law. We’re free from having to rely on our own performance in order to be saved. These guys wanted to add something. They wanted to add performance to the gospel. By adding performance to the gospel, Paul says, “They were seeking to make us slaves.” That happens all the time in church. You would be amazed. Any time you get angry because people in church don’t do what you want to do, you’re probably borderlining it. It’s one thing to have a different opinion. It’s another thing to try and force people to do what you want them to do.

When Judy and I were asked to plant a church in Seattle in 1996 (I think it was), we were also told at the same time we had to raise \$600,000. We raised all but \$36,000 in about six weeks. It was that last \$36,000 that we had to figure out, “Where’s this going to come from?” And, out of the blue someone from the state of Washington called and said, “Hey, my name is Joe (that’s not his real name) and I heard you are going to be planting a church on Capitol Hill. They really need a church on Capitol Hill. How much money do you need?” I said, “Well, I need \$36,000.” He said, “You got it, \$36,000.” I said, “Really, that’s it?” He said, “They need a church.” I said, “Okay. Good. Fine.” I called Mission to North America, called everyone, and we came to Seattle, and started the church. As soon as we started worshiping, Joe started attending. Shortly after he started attending he called me up. “You and I need to have a conversation.” I said, “About what?” He said, “Did you know that your worship leader is a Democrat?” I said, “You know, I never really asked him but I assumed with all the tattoos and earrings and business he might be leaning that way.” I said, “So, how is that a problem?” He said, “Well, here’s what’s going to happen. Either you fire him or you send him to an economic conference that I’ve set up in northern Texas. Otherwise, if you don’t either fire him or send him to this economic conference, then I will not give you a dime.” To be honest with you, it wasn’t even tempting. I said, “Thanks, but no thanks. I don’t want your money. I can’t use your money.” He was shocked. But what he was trying to do was impose slavery on this brand new church. He was trying to make what’s important in that church be your economic views or your political views or something other than the gospel of Jesus. I asked him, “Do I not preach the gospel?” “Oh, yeah. You preach the gospel.” “But, you’re saying you won’t give any money unless we do what you want to do?” “Right.” “I guess you won’t be giving any money.” The upside of the story: within two weeks all of that money came in from other people that we didn’t plan on. The fact is he was seeking to bring me and the church into slavery. Anytime you do that to other people you are doing the same, and Paul says flat out, “It’s wrong.” It’s as simple as that. It’s wrong. That’s why a lot of people are offended by church. That’s why a lot of people don’t go to church. It’s because at some point in their lives they’ve gone to church and thought, “Man, all it’s about is obeying other people’s rules,” and they never get the grace of the gospel and they never hear about Jesus. Paul says, “That can’t happen. It can’t be the case.” Notice what he says next.

—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)

Paul is saying that this whole fight with Titus, this whole thing that revolved around Titus, had eternal implications. It had implications not just for Titus (certainly) but for everyone who would follow after. Paul says, “We didn’t yield to them even for a moment so that the gospel might be preserved for you.” Now, here’s the good news for you. What’s true of Titus is true of you. If they did not make Titus get circumcised in order to be saved, that means you don’t have to do anything to be saved, either, except to trust in Jesus. The question is, “Have you trusted Jesus?” Some of you may be visiting and maybe you’re not Christians. Have you trusted Jesus? Some of you have spent your whole lives trying to keep the rules because you thought that’s what it means to be a Christian, and maybe today you’re figuring out that’s not it. What it means to be a Christian is to trust Jesus. Paul was mule-headed about that. Thank God!

The last thing we see in this text is Paul’s validation, or the validation of his mission. Let’s look at that.

⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me. ⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter

for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles),⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me . . . (ESV)

So did you notice again Paul's language? It's very nuanced. He says, "To those who seemed to be influential . . ." He doesn't say, "They gave me a thumbs up," at least that's not the first thing he says. "Those who seemed to be influential added nothing to me." Remember, Jesus plus nothing equals everything. So those who seemed to be influential didn't say, "Paul, your gospel is good but you also need to add circumcision." Or, "You also need to add this," or, "You need to add that." "You need to add not drinking wine." Or, "You need to add not doing this." They added nothing. He says, "On the contrary, not only did they not add anything but they said I was good to go (my paraphrase). In fact they said the same God who blessed Peter's ministry to the circumcised was the same one working in me. In other words, the apostles said I'm on par with them." At this point in the Galatian church where they're reading this letter, the argument is over. The false teachers would have been trying to slither out the back of the church as the letter was being read. Of course they couldn't get out because the doors would have been locked, so they would have been stuck in there. Paul's putting a thumb in their eye. He's saying, "Not only is there one gospel, not only did Titus not have to be circumcised, but the very apostles that you guys keep name dropping extended to me, not you, the right hand of fellowship." And that's when Paul begins to name drop as well. "If you're wondering who it is who gave me the right hand of fellowship, some guys who seemed influential. Do you know these guys, Peter, James, and John? They were the ones who confirmed my ministry. Yeah. They weren't a big deal, but . . ." Then he adds one last thing here. It almost seems like a throwaway line, yet it's just as important.

¹⁰ *Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do. (ESV)*

Notice he doesn't say, "They commanded us to remember the poor." In other words, "Paul, your gospel is good but you've got to remember to do this . . ." Paul says, "They asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was willing to do. They didn't tell me anything that I already didn't know. They didn't command me to do anything that I wasn't already doing." The point of this whole section is that the freedom that has been gained for us is so incredibly precious that Paul is willing to do anything and to stand up to anyone in order to maintain it. The American civil rights movement on August 28, 1963, Martin Luther King stands up and he gives the "I have a dream speech." It wasn't until July of the next year that the Civil Rights Act was passed. It was in September of 1862 that the Emancipation Proclamation was given. It took over 100 years between when Lincoln said, "All the slaves are free," and when they actually were free – when they could actually experience anything that any other person in our country could do. Now, what person at this point, especially if you're an African American or a woman would want to go backwards? Who would want to go back to 1963, 1953, 1943, 1875? It would be silly, would it not? You have to keep pushing forward. That's Paul's case he is making for the gospel. If Jesus has removed from you having to obey all the works of the law in order to be saved, why would you then want to go back and do those things again? Why would you want to bring yourself under slavery when you in fact are free? Think about that.