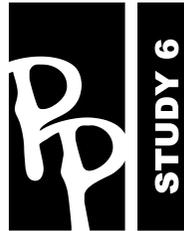


## THIS IS NOT THE FIRST TIME



### Galatians 2:1-5

This Study Paper contains the following:-

- 📁 Introduction to the passage
- 📁 What these verses mean
- 📁 Summary
- 📁 A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses
- 📁 Focus Point 1: Chronology of Paul's movements following his conversion at Damascus
- 📁 Focus Point 2: The Church Meeting
- 📁 Over to you

#### Introduction to the passage

When we first read the beginning of chapter 2, we could think that Paul is continuing with his biography. But this is not the case because in chapter 1 Paul has dealt with the source of the gospel. That is the gospel which came to him by revelation from Jesus Christ. Now Paul is moving on to something different. What he is going to set out now is crucial to understanding the gospel of Jesus Christ. It affects us today because Paul, at the beginning of chapter 2, is telling the Galatians about a visit to Jerusalem.

This visit to Jerusalem is recorded in chapter 15 of Acts. A meeting took place of the church leaders and became known as the Council of Jerusalem. This Council made clear, once and for all, a subject that has implications for us today. If this Council had not come to the conclusion it did, the Christian Church would not be as we know it.

#### What these verses mean

Verse 1

***Fourteen years later I went up again to Jerusalem,***

This is probably fourteen years after the visit to Jerusalem (1:18). Paul

had visited the city since then and before the current visit. Paul does not mention the second visit in his Galatians letter, but it is referred to in Acts 11:29-30. This took place whilst Paul and Barnabas were in Antioch, when they were sent to Jerusalem by the church with gifts that had been collected for the famine relief. It is likely that Paul did not mention this visit in his letter to the Galatians, because it would have taken him from the main thrust of his argument of being independent from the apostles. Having set out his case in chapter 1, he now moves on to the visit for the Jerusalem Council. By the time of the relief visit, his ministry (i.e. the gospel he preached and taught) in Cilicia and Syria was well established. According to this sequence, the visit Paul is now referring to would have been his third one to Jerusalem.

#### ***this time with Barnabas.***

When Paul made his first visit to Jerusalem after his conversion, the disciples were afraid of him, not quite believing that he was a follower of Christ. It was Barnabas who took Paul and introduced him to Peter and James (1:18 and Acts 9:26). Paul had to make a hurried departure from Jerusalem after his life was threatened. He was taken to the port of Caesarea from where he sailed to his home city of Tarsus. (Acts 9:30). Tarsus was the chief city of Cilicia, the region Paul mentioned with Syria in 1:21. Paul remained there until Barnabas sought him out to go to Antioch. There the two men worked together for a whole year teaching the people (Acts 11:26-27).

#### ***I took Titus along also.***

Titus was an uncircumcised Greek (see 2:3). The false teachers had been teaching that the true gospel message was "Believe in Jesus **and** keep the ceremonies of Moses (circumcision)." Paul takes Titus, as a representative of true Gentile Christians who were not keeping the ceremonies given by Moses. It shows to us how important the purpose of the Jerusalem Council meeting was.

Verse 2

#### ***I went in response to a revelation***

Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem because of a revelation. In other words they went under God's directions. However Acts 15:2 tells us that their going was the decision of a church meeting. Can both statements be true? The answer is yes. Paul was prepared by a direct revelation for the task that the church gave him. We learn therefore that decisions of a church meeting may be the way God confirms his will. Compare Matthew 18:18 and Acts 13: 2 – 4; in both these cases church decisions are said to show God's will. See *Focus Point 2* at the end of this Study Paper, **The Church Meeting**.

**and set before them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles.**

Paul communicated to the leaders who gathered for the Council meeting the gospel he preached. This was the gospel revealed to him by Christ and he considered it to be absolutely crucial. The word “preach” is in the present tense; Paul is still preaching the same gospel he formerly declared to them at Jerusalem.

**But I did this privately to those who seemed to be leaders,**

The gospel Paul declared was the same gospel that was accepted by those Paul recognised to be leaders. This fact may have been confirmed in one or more private meetings – perhaps described in Acts 15:4, most probably before the Council itself. He did this to check out some information and facts. At Antioch, some Judaizers had come from Jerusalem and were teaching that people could not be saved unless they were circumcised. Paul needed to know if these men had been sent by the Jerusalem church. Paul told this private meeting the gospel of Christ he preached, so that, if anyone disagreed, then they could say so.

**for fear that I was running or had run my race in vain.**

Paul is sure and confident in the gospel he preached. He is not wavering or doubting. He was anxious that Jewish Christians should not impose Mosaic laws on Gentile believers, whom he had taught that the work of Christ had made them free from the old Jewish ceremonies of worship. If Jewish laws were now imposed on Gentile believers, all Paul’s work would be in vain.

Verse 3

**Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek.**

Paul’s taking Titus to the Jerusalem Council was important. Titus was, like many of the Galatians, a Gentile. Paul is emphasising to the Galatians that the Council did not require Titus to be circumcised. Here is proof that salvation is found in Christ alone, outside of the law of Moses. Later on in the letter, Paul writes that it makes no difference if people are circumcised or not; the only thing that counts is faith in Christ that will show itself in love (5:6).

Verse 4

**[This matter arose] because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks**

Who were these false brethren? It seems that within the ranks of the church there were those who were hankering after the old ways. They were acting in secrecy intermingling with the **true** believers. There is no place for secrecy amongst believers when they gather together. Now

these false brethren were represented at the Council meeting but in a deceitful way. Their plan was to hi-jack the meeting to try and get their teaching accepted. It is because of their presence and argument that Titus was such an important test case.

**to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.**

We are now getting to the crucial issues. There are two positions. We are either free in Christ or we are slaves, bound in chains like prisoners. The gospel which was revealed to Paul and which he has preached and is now defending actually rescues us from slavery. We are slaves to sin and Satan and it is only the good news of Jesus Christ’s dying on the cross to take the punishment we deserve that can rescue us and free us from Satan’s imprisonment. It is this [Christ’s] work of atonement<sup>1</sup> that makes the difference, not anything that we might do, whether it is religious ritual, observances or good deeds.

Putting it another way, Christ has fulfilled the Mosaic law on our behalf; we believers do not have to keep it to earn our salvation. We have this great liberty by trusting in Christ’s work. Compare Romans 8:3. To try to earn our salvation by perfect law-keeping would make us hopeless slaves to the law; hopeless, because - being sinners – we could not keep it perfectly, anyway! See Acts 15:10.

These false brethren were not acting honestly. Instead of engaging in an open discussion, they spied. This suggests that they were seeking opportunities to discredit Paul’s gospel. Satan is the deceiver; having started with Adam and Eve he has continued with all generations ever since. If Satan can use people within the church, he will.

Verse 5

**We did not give in to them for a moment,**

Paul would not allow Titus to be circumcised. He spoke against the teaching of the false brethren. He did not alter his gospel. The conference in Acts 15:1–24 was a critical time in early church history. If Paul’s defence of the gospel had failed, Christianity either would have become corrupted by being mixed with old Jewish ceremonies from then on, or would have split into two churches, Jewish and Gentile. Either would have meant a tragic loss of pure gospel truth.

**so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.**

The truth is that Christ has done all that is necessary for the salvation of every believer. Salvation is God’s gracious gift. To suggest that the believer must also do some ceremonies means:

- i. Christ’s work was somehow incomplete
- ii. God is not satisfied with what Christ did

iii. Sinners are able to please God by what they do

These three things deny that salvation is by grace, which is the heart of the gospel. Therefore, says Paul, he could not agree with and give way to these false brethren.



## Summary

The gospel that Christ revealed to Paul was simple. Man's salvation was achieved by Jesus Christ dying as a substitute for him on the cross to satisfy God's law. Simple faith in that atoning work enables a person to be saved from God's anger and inherit eternal life. Such a person is justified in God's sight. But man's corrupted nature makes him think that he has to add to that and do something special. There were those in the early church who felt that the law of Moses had to be observed as well. Paul calls them **false**, recognising the damage they would do to the gospel message if their teaching were allowed to prevail. They had come into the Galatian churches and subverted the minds of the Christians who were young in the faith. "Look," Paul is saying to them, "this is not the first time." These false people have been around for a while. There was a special meeting held in Jerusalem, attended by the church leaders (including apostles), who considered this matter. Titus, the Greek, was there too and he became a test case. He, being a Gentile, was accepted as a Christian without the need to observe any Mosaic law, despite the presence of false brethren who had infiltrated the meeting. If that were not so, he would have still been in slavery to sin, because the law cannot save. The true gospel gives us freedom in Christ.



## A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

### Our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus

Galatians 2:4. (Read also Galatians 5:13-26.)

#### Introduction

There are two kinds of freedom. There is human freedom, when people are free **to do whatever they like**. This is not true freedom because we are all sinners and therefore do not like to do godly things. To be free to do what we sinners like leads to increase of sin. Galatians 5:19- 21.

There is, secondly, spiritual freedom. This is when people are free **to do what they ought**. This is the freedom which Christian believers can experience because Christ has fully atoned for all their sin. This liberty means that the believer's conscience can be free from fear of accusation of fault by God, or Satan, or itself! Galatians 5: 22,23.

1. The believer is free from the curse of God's law. Every unbeliever is under the wrath of God – John 3:36. God, as our maker, requires of us undivided love and unfailing obedience; see Galatians 3:10. To do less than this is to be in peril of his judgement. But the person "in Christ" is in a different situation. See Galatians 3:13.
2. The believer is free from the slavery of having to keep God's law to earn his salvation. Because we are sinners nothing that we do to please God can be successful. Our best efforts are still sinful in God's sight – Romans 3:23. Therefore any attempt to please God by our efforts to fulfil his law is a hopeless form of slavery. The unbeliever trying to do God's will is like the fly struggling in a spider's web. Every effort of the fly entangles him more. Every inadequate effort of the sinner to please God actually adds more to his condemnation.
3. The believer is free to serve Christ because:
  - i by his new birth he now sees a preciousness in Christ
  - ii by the indwelling Spirit he is made spiritually strong to serve Christ; Galatians 5:22.
  - iii by experiencing God's grace to him, he is motivated to serve by grateful love to God.(None of these things were true when he was an unbeliever, dead to God!)

#### Conclusion

Satan tries to rob believers of their experience of this liberty by making them feel that they can earn merit with God by good deeds. Such ideas were "creeping in secretly" in Galatia and are still about. Believers do good works out of gratitude to God, to show love. God's grace and forgiveness to us are so great. We should be utterly devoted to him. Our devotion is not a credit to us, merely a holy duty.

*Note from page 7*

<sup>1</sup> Not all commentators are agreed on the sequence outlined in this chronology of events. The timetable here follows the basis set out in "Free in Christ" by Edgar Andrews, published by Evangelical Press.



## Focus Point 1:

### Chronology of Paul's movements following his conversion at Damascus <sup>1</sup>

- Year 1 First period in Damascus preaching Christ (Acts 9:19-22).  
Visit to Arabia, the gospel revealed to him. Returns to Damascus (Gal.1:17).  
Second period in Damascus preaching Christ (Acts 9:23).  
His life is threatened, he escapes from Damascus (Acts 9:23-25)
- Year 3 First visit to Jerusalem. He sees Peter and James (Acts 9:26-28, Gal.1:18-19).  
His life is again threatened; he escapes from Jerusalem. (Acts 9:29).  
Journey to Tarsus in Cilicia, his home town (Acts 9:30).  
Preaches in Syria and Cilicia (Gal.1:21).  
Barnabas seeks him out in Tarsus and brings him to Antioch. He becomes a preacher/teacher in that church (Acts 11:25-26).  
Whilst in Antioch, Paul and Barnabas take gifts for famine relief to Jerusalem (second visit) (Acts 11:30).  
Paul's first missionary journey. He plants churches in Galatia (Acts 13 and 14).  
He returns to Antioch. Dispute arises with Judaizers who had come from Jerusalem (Acts 15:1).
- Year 14 He goes to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Paul consults with the apostles, participates in the Council of Jerusalem. The Judaizers are defeated (2:1-5).



## Focus Point 2:

### The Church Meeting

From time to time the baptised members of a local church will need to meet in addition to their normal worship service, in order to discover God's will for them in various practical matters. The following list indicates the purposes for which the early churches met:

Acts 1:15-26	To replace an apostle
2:1	To wait on the Lord
6:2-6	To set aside men for special duties in the church
11:22	To provide for inter-church fellowship
13:1	For the ministry of the Word
13:2,3	To send missionaries

14:27	To hear about God's mighty acts
15:1-29	To defend and confirm biblical truth
15:30,31	To receive news from other churches
1 Corinthians 5:1-5	
Matthew 18:15-20	To discipline offenders
1 Corinthians 11:17-34	To observe the Lord's Supper
1 Corinthians 14:26	For the exercise of spiritual gifts
2 Corinthians 8:19	To deal with monetary gifts
Colossians 4:16	For the reading of the Word
Hebrews 10:25	For mutual exhortation

If we are to follow the example of the early church, therefore, matters like the ministry, the diaconate, finance, eldership, evangelistic outreach and fellowship with other churches are all matters to be discussed and decided on by the gathered local church. The deacons would normally work in close relationship with the elders, who have the responsibility of the oversight of the church.

It is important that all members of a local church should try to be present in such meetings and all matters should be discussed in an attitude of prayer and worship. The Lord is present! (James 5:8,9).

The aim of the church meeting should be to try and reach a unanimous agreement about the matters discussed (Acts 15:22-25). Some practical matters (i.e. building, repairs etc.) can be decided by the deacons of the church without necessarily referring all the details to the full church meeting. It is enough if the church meeting is merely informed of the deacons' plans in such matters (1 Thess.5:12).



## Over to you

If a person in your church came to you and shared a burden for a particular work of mission, how would you respond?

What kind of gospel do you preach to your hearers? Is it based on God's grace or human effort?

What do you think is more important: keeping peace in the church or being faithful to the truth of God's Word? When you have answered that, consider how you are applying it in your own situation.