

Galatians

Chapter Two

Introduction

The believers in Galatia were being pressured to "set aside the grace of God." Among other things,

They were being pressured to observe religious "days and months and seasons and years";¹

They were being pressured to submit to the rite of circumcision;²

They were being pressured to supplement the power of the Holy Spirit by the works of the flesh.³

You will be pressured to "set aside the grace of God." Some way, somehow, someone will put pressure on you to observe or to not observe certain "days, months, seasons, or years..." Some way, somehow, someone will put pressure on you to keep an external religious rite... Some way, somehow, someone will put pressure on you to supplement the power of the Holy Spirit by the works of the flesh.

When you are pressured to "set aside the grace of God," how will you react?

Two men in our text felt the pressure to set aside the grace of God. The leading apostles of the first century church, Paul and Peter, each were pressured while in Antioch. They each reacted very differently: Paul *withstood* under the pressure to set aside grace, while Peter *withdrew* under the pressure to set aside grace.

If it was possible for Peter - an apostle - to withdraw, then it is all too possible for you to withdraw... But you can - and should - withstand!

¹Galatians 4:10

²Galatians 5:2; 6:12,13

³Galatians 3:3

What makes the difference? According to our text, what makes the difference is that you both *believe* and *behave* consistent with an essential doctrine of the Christian faith. At the end of the chapter, after using himself and Peter as examples, Paul discusses the doctrine of justification by faith in Jesus Christ. He uses the word "justified" four times in verses sixteen and seventeen; the word "righteousness" in verse twenty-one is another form of the same Greek root word.

Justification is the act of God whereby He declares a believing sinner righteous on the basis of the finished work of Jesus Christ on the Cross. That is the heart of the gospel Paul proclaimed to the Galatians; they believed it and were saved. They were saved by grace through faith in Jesus, *plus nothing*. Now the false teachers had come with an addition to Paul's teaching. In addition to faith in Jesus Christ, they taught that you must be faithful to the restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals of the Jewish religion. For them, you are saved by grace through faith, *plus works of righteousness*.

Paul withstood under their pressure; he went right on proclaiming - both in his belief and in his behavior - that you are justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Peter withdrew under their pressure; his belief might not have changed, but by his behavior he was proclaiming that you are justified by keeping the works of righteousness.

#1 When You Withstand Under The Pressure
To Set Aside Grace You Proclaim You Are
Justified By Faith In Jesus Christ
(v1-10)

It will help if you remember that at its beginning and for many years afterward the church was comprised of born-again Jews. Even after having experienced the wonderful saving grace of God many of the Jews found it difficult to let go of their religious heritage and traditions. They found it even more difficult to accept Gentiles as brothers in Jesus Christ on an equal par with themselves. Even more difficult still was the fact that these Gentile converts to Christianity had never kept and were not keeping any of the Jewish traditions.

A faction of teachers rose up within the church demanding that Gentiles come under certain restrictions, rules, rites, and rituals in order to be saved. They were called Judaizers and their teaching is summarized in a statement they made in Acts 15:24, "You must be circumcised and keep the law."

When these Judaizers opposed Paul at Antioch he withstood their efforts to set aside the grace of God by adding works of righteousness to the gospel. The first ten verses of Galatians Two discuss their opposition and Paul's efforts to withstand them.

Galatians 2:1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.

When we left Paul in chapter one he had returned to his home town of Tarsus. There he made tents and waited on the Lord. Barnabas, who had become acquainted with Paul in Jerusalem, was in Antioch. He had gone down to that Gentile city to encourage the work of the Lord that was going on there. There being a great need for teaching in Antioch, Barnabas sent for Paul, and the two of them ministered side by side. The Judaizers had come in seeking to undermine the church with their false teaching about works. Paul grabbed Barnabas and a young convert named Titus and headed to Jerusalem.

Galatians 2:2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

When Paul says he "went up by revelation" he probably means that the Holy Spirit directed him, perhaps by a word of prophecy, to journey to Jerusalem and settle the issues raised by the Judaizers. He met privately with the leaders of the Jerusalem church and laid out the essential points of the gospel that Jesus had given him to preach among the Gentile peoples of the Roman Empire. He wasn't seeking their approval; he only wanted the gospel message to be unhindered. When he speaks of "running in vain" he might have in mind the picture of a messenger speeding along on foot with an important message. Nothing should be allowed to hinder the messenger. Certainly if the church at Jerusalem embraced the false teaching of the Judaizers, the gospel of Jesus would be hindered.

Galatians 2:3 Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

Titus was a Gentile convert. The Judaizers said such people needed to be circumcised in order to be saved. But here he was, an uncircumcised trophy of God's grace! Why set aside the grace of God and force Titus to perform a work of righteousness which was so obviously unnecessary? It was a fatal blow to the Judaizers that even in Jerusalem Titus was not compelled to be circumcised. Grace prevailed over works.

Galatians 2:4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage),

Galatians 2:5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

The Judaizers were false teachers of a false gospel that would take freed men and return them to the slavery of Jewish religious traditions. Paul withstood them, never even giving them a moments credibility.

Galatians 2:6 But from those who seemed to be something; whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man; for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.

Paul refers to the leaders of the Jerusalem church as "those who were of reputation," as "those who seemed to be something," and (later) as those who "seemed to be pillars." He's not being disrespectful. He's answering an argument of the Judaizers. They had appealed to these men as those pillars of the church who were, they said, in agreement with their legalistic teaching. But they weren't in agreement with the Judaizers! And, whether or not they were, they should not be followed because of *reputation*, but because of *revelation*. In other words, their message was what mattered.

Galatians 2:7 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter

Galatians 2:8 (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles),

By His sovereign choice, God had called Paul to preach the gospel of grace to the Gentiles - the "uncircumcised" - and He had called Peter to preach the gospel of grace to the Jews - the

"circumcised." It was the same gospel message going out to two distinct groups.

Galatians 2:9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

Galatians 2:10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

"Cephas" is another name for Peter; James is the Jesus' half-brother, the son of Mary and Joseph; and John is the apostle John. These men, the leaders at Jerusalem, were in full agreement and fellowship with Paul. They recognized the work God was doing through Paul and encouraged him in it. They would not hinder his running with the message of grace to the Gentiles by adding works to it.

All they asked was that Paul "remember the poor." Because of famine and persecution, plus huge numbers of homeless converts, the church at Jerusalem was a poor church. They were asking Paul and the Gentiles for help! The Gentile churches were therefore not under the authority of Jerusalem; they were seen as independent fellowships, affiliated only by the common gospel of grace and by love for one another.

This encounter at Jerusalem decided once and for all that the gospel is the gospel of grace, for Jews and Gentiles alike. Titus was not compelled to be circumcised and keep the Jewish law. The gospel was by grace through faith in Jesus, *plus nothing!*

Though it was once and for all decided that works are not a part of your salvation, men still add works to the gospel. Roman Catholic doctrine is a monstrous system of works you must perform in order to be righteous before God. Among Protestants there are those who teach you must be baptized in water to be saved; there are those who teach you must speak in tongues to be saved; there are those who teach you must worship on the sabbath to be saved.

Anytime anyone adds anything to the gospel of grace it is no longer the gospel... And Paul says that those who teach such things are to be "

accursed."

Beloved, withstand the pressure!

#2 When You Withdraw Under The Pressure
To Set Aside Grace You Proclaim You Are
Justified By Works Of Righteousness
(v11-21)

It is only too easy to withdraw under the pressure. Anyone can
- even an apostle.

Galatians 2:11 Now when Peter had come to Antioch, I withstood him to his face,
because he was to be blamed;

Galatians 2:12 for before certain men came from James, he would eat with the Gentiles;
but when they came, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing those who were of the
circumcision.

Galatians 2:13 And the rest of the Jews also played the hypocrite with him, so that even
Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy.

Peter went to visit the Gentile church at Antioch. It was the custom of the early church to share a meal once a week. They called it the "love feast"; we call them pot-lucks! Peter, though a Jew, had been set free from Jewish dietary laws. He could eat anything he wanted, with whomever he wanted. He enjoyed this wonderful freedom of grace - until some Jews came from the church at Jerusalem. Fearing their criticism, Peter gradually withdrew from fellowshiping with the Gentiles. His hypocrisy led others, including even Barnabas, into hypocrisy. He was causing a serious division in the church between Jews and Gentiles.

Paul calls it hypocrisy because, as we just learned, Peter believed that the gospel was the gospel of grace and that it excluded the keeping of Jewish laws. Yet here he was, **believing** one way but **behaving** another way.

By the way, it is typical of those who are adding works of righteousness to the gospel to adamantly say that they believe the gospel to be the gospel of grace, *plus nothing!* Yet their behavior proves them hypocrites in the worst sense.

Galatians 2:14 But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter before them all, "If you, being a Jew, live in the manner of Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live as Jews?"

Peter's public sin required a public rebuke. Paul exposed Peter's hypocrisy. Why should Peter, a Jew, enjoy the freedom of a Gentile, yet compel Gentiles, who were always free from Jewish traditions, to now become enslaved to them? The law couldn't be that important to Peter if he could sometimes dispense with it and live like a Gentile. Why, then, was it so important that Gentiles be compelled to live as Jews?

Galatians 2:15 "We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

Galatians 2:16 "knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law no flesh shall be justified.

Remember that to be justified means to be declared righteous. The Jews were circumcised and had the law; but they had learned that they could never be justified by keeping the law! Otherwise they would not have needed to accept Christ's sacrifice on their behalf and be converted. Even the Jews had to have faith in Jesus Christ. They were not saved by keeping the law; they were saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. Paul's argument is simple and final: If Jews could not be saved by keeping the law, why compel Gentiles to keep it? You are not and cannot be justified by keeping any law, by performing any work or works of righteousness. It is by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus on the Cross that you are declared righteous before God.

Galatians 2:17 "But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is Christ therefore a minister of sin? Certainly not!

The opponents of grace always argued, and still always argue, that if you eliminate the law then you encourage sinful living. A person could believe in Jesus then do whatever he or she pleased, having no need to do good works. *Not true!* That would make Jesus a promoter of sin - a thing never to be considered.

Galatians 2:18 "For if I build again those things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

To return to law as a way of life is to return to a place of condemnation under the penalty of the law. You see, you will always find yourself breaking the law, and the penalty for anything less than absolutely perfect obedience is death.

Galatians 2:19 "For I through the law died to the law that I might live to God.

The law demanded death for those who broke it - all the members of the human race. Jesus died in their place - He died in **your** place - that the law might have no more power over you.

Look at it this way:

Let's say you commit a crime and are found guilty and are given a jail sentence. If you die right after sentencing, they don't drag your corpse to jail! Having died, you are now free from the condemnation of the law.

God says that you have died to the law if you have trusted Jesus as your Savior. The law cannot condemn you, and you are free from its demands.

Galatians 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.

When Jesus died on the Cross, the Bible says you died with Him; when He rose from the dead, the Bible says you rose with Him. Spiritually speaking, you share in the death and resurrection of Jesus. His death frees you from the law; His resurrection fills you with His grace. You are transformed from within. Jesus lives in you by His indwelling Spirit. The life you entered by grace through faith you now go on to experience by grace through faith - **not** by works of righteousness. What you could never accomplish by your own self-effort to keep the law God is able to accomplish in you as you walk by faith in Jesus in the power of His Spirit.

Galatians 2:21 "I do not set aside the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the law, then Christ died in vain."

These are strong words! If you could do **anything** - however slight - to be saved, then Jesus died on the Cross for nothing; it was all a terrible mistake! If you could be circumcised, or keep the Jewish law, in order to be saved, then Jesus died on the Cross for nothing; it was all a terrible mistake! If you could attend mass, or go to confession, or be confirmed, or have last rites performed, in order to be saved, then Jesus died on the Cross for nothing; it was all a terrible mistake! If you could be baptized, or speak in tongues, or keep the sabbath, in order to be saved, then Jesus died on the Cross for nothing; it was all a terrible mistake!

If you withdraw under the pressure to set aside grace, you are proclaiming that you are justified by works of righteousness. You will probably still believe that you are saved by grace through faith, *plus nothing*; but your behavior is hypocritical and proclaims a different and false gospel. When you behave as though you must add works of righteousness to either enter or experience the Christian life, you are saying that Jesus died on the Cross for nothing. Don't withdraw under pressure; don't set aside the grace of God.

Conclusion

If the Judaizers were correct, then Peter would have been correct in separating from the Gentiles until they came under the law and were circumcised. You can easily see that the Judaizers, and Peter, were incorrect. Jews and Gentiles alike were saved by grace through faith in Jesus, *plus nothing!* The Gentiles did not need to observe the Jewish restrictions, rites, rules, and rituals in order to enter or experience the Christian life.

Many groups pressure you today. The same is true of them that was true of the Judaizers! If they are correct, then you are not saved until you perform the sacraments, or until you are baptized in water, or until you speak in tongues... Or until you add works of righteousness to the gospel of grace. When you add works you set aside the grace of God.

The pressure to set aside grace will sometimes be intense; never, never succumb to it.