

The unchanging gospel is worth living and standing for.

Galatians 2:1–10 “Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. [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. [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. [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, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. [10] Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” (ESV)

The unchanging gospel is worth living and standing for.

Today, in the U.S., is Independence Day. A day of celebration for the establishment of our nation. With all of its sordid moments, it has been a land where the idea of freedom has been pursued and much good has been done. So we bath our hotdogs in ketchup and watch the sky light up with explosions to mark the day. *A man who finds a three-day weekend has found a good thing!*

This holiday might have us reflecting on where we have been and where we should go. Reflecting on those that have lifted the rafters of our land before us, the heroes that took a stand for the right things even when the prevailing thought missed it.

This reflection brought me back to a film that had the same elements of heroic standing for what is right and good. The 1996 film, Independence Day!

Some of us are too young to remember the movie so let me sum it up for you and commend it to you! Aliens have invaded earth and things are all but ruined. But it is the event that finally brings humanity together. The iconic scene of the movie is a speech by the fighter-pilot president, Thomas Whitmore, ahead of the global attack on the invading force.

Speaking on antiquated radio communications: *“Good morning. In less than an hour, aircraft from here will join others from around the world. And you will be launching the largest aerial battle in this history of mankind.*

“Mankind -- that word should have new meaning for all of us today.

“We can't be consumed by our petty differences anymore.

“We will be united in our common interests.

“Perhaps it's fate that today is the 4th of July, and you will once again be fighting for our freedom, not from tyranny, oppression, or persecution -- but from annihilation.

“We're fighting for our right to live, to exist.

“And should we win the day, the 4th of July will no longer be known as an American holiday, but as the day when the world declared in one voice:

"We will not go quietly into the night!

We will not vanish without a fight!

We're going to live on!

We're going to survive!"

Today, we celebrate our Independence Day!"

You can feel it! The speech is followed by self-sacrifice that saves humanity, heroes taking a stand and giving themselves for others.

It is such a familiar story.

There is something about these things that stir us at a soul level. Because that's how the ultimate hero gave us something to stand for. Not with a rousing speech but by giving his life that humanity would find forgiveness in his name, that the wayward would be rescued from ourselves. By the free gift of grace.

Galatians is the letter to churches that calls them back to this truth, to the good news of Jesus.

Paul the apostle is writing to a collection of churches that have fallen prey to a tainted version of the good news of Jesus. Salvation, forgiveness is found in believing in Jesus - not in earning it by way of submitting to a moral code or accomplishing the right behavior. But false teachers were making the opposite claim. 'Sure Jesus is the Messiah, but to be truly his you have to keep the law, key among them circumcision.'

It was bringing division in the church as Gentile believers were called into question, not on the work of Jesus for them but on their behavior for salvation.

Paul won't have it. And he is ramping up his stand against this non-gospel.

He gives more of his story - the confirmation of the gospel - to dispel these false teachers and revitalize the church in their freedom.

And in so doing we can recognize that the gospel is unchanging, it has implications, and it is worth standing for.

The Gospel is Unchanging

Situation - Paul is recounting the story of his going to Jerusalem, the location or anchor of the church, the home of the apostles. A revelation brought him (he doesn't tell us what it was), and he privately laid out the gospel he proclaimed to ensure he was not running in vain.

So it's likely that he has another reason to go to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus but while he is there he meets with some of the apostles to check his ministry.

We have already heard that the gospel is sourced in God - Paul didn't get what he preached from man but directly from Jesus. So Paul isn't insecure about the gospel he has been preaching but this a check to confirm that it is in line with what the church has always preached.

Honestly, if leaders had this level of accountability and relationship, the church would be saved from a lot of stupidity.

The church was still -as it has always been- wrestling with grace and its relationship to the Mosaic law. The juxtaposition of the freedom of the gospel and the slavery of the law...

In Judea it hasn't been a big issue because of the demographics of who is part of the church.

"...They simply had not confronted most of these issues practically. It would have been extremely easy for them to miss the implications of the gospel when it came to living as a Gentile Christian. It would have felt natural for them to say: *Of course all Christian should eat kosher!* or something similar. But the ramifications of such a "small" mistake would have been enormous. There would have been two opposing parties within Christianity that were hostile to each other on the fundamental point of whether we need to add external behaviors to internal belief in Christ in order to be saved." TK

So Paul takes the opportunity to bring it up and be sure.

All along Paul's call is one back to the gospel preached at first. And while in Jerusalem it is confirmed that this is the only gospel!

That we bring only our need to Jesus who in grace lavishes his righteousness upon us, changing our identity, securing our future, liberating us from sin's slavery, and giving us something to live for.

It is all he preaches.

Colossians 1:19–23 “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[21] And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [22] he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, [23] if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.” (ESV)

And the apostles confirm it. James, Peter, and John see Paul and Barnabas as partners in the gospel extending the right hand of fellowship. They added nothing to Paul’s gospel. And what’s more, Titus was not forced to be circumcised while there.

Sounds strange. Titus was a Greek so he would have known nothing of Jewish tradition growing up. But he came to believe in Jesus and would preach him and plant churches for his glory. But in the freedom of the gospel he never had to become a Jew to be a Christian.

How would they know? A vastly different culture than ours in that most baths for average folks were public in nature. So, as awkward as it sounds to our modern ears, guys in church would have seen Titus. But in confirmation of the gospel, it doesn’t ruffle the feathers of the apostles... false Christians get nervous, but those commissioned to lead the church don’t fall for the false gospel.

Only in Christ can we become "holy in his sight." Christ makes us clean. "So the acceptance of Titus by Jewish believers was a vivid illustration of this principle, that an individual becomes spiritually clean and acceptable through Christ, and not through any deeds or rituals. We need to keep repeating this truth to ourselves and each other, just as the New Testament did. Gentiles could become full members of the people of God without becoming Jewish in custom or culture. The acceptance of Titus was a radical public statement of the implications of the gospel." TK

There are not two different gospels but two different ministry fields, spheres, with the same message, be saved by the work of Jesus for you!

The church looking to innovate beyond this message - that we are sinners in need of a Savior, and Jesus is the One, who takes it upon himself to be our sacrifice, to give forgiveness and life - is in danger of embracing a non-gospel and being false brothers.

Rootedness in the gospel - that it is affirmed by the church throughout history. We don't need some new iteration of the gospel in our day. Just rediscovery of what was at first.

That's not to say that the gospel won't change you. It is unchanging, but it will change you. Titus may be uncircumcised, but he now lives for the gospel.

The Gospel has Implications

We sometimes approach faith or the gospel like a college course. We are sure there must be prerequisites. We need to do something before we are "ready" for it. But the gospel is the whole thing.

There are no requirements to earn salvation (coming to Jesus), but there is a way to live from this salvation given.

See two bits of that here in Paul's story.

Paul reveals that the gospel levels the ground at the foot of the cross forever. He makes a point to say he was with the influential leaders of the church, but he doesn't care about influence because God shows no partiality.

This is important for Gentile believers and for us. Because that is the whole argument in the church, that there are better classes of Christians. Paul reports that it "makes no difference."

We can fall into similar trouble in our day, usually when it comes to self-righteousness and how we view other people. This week I was sharing with the elders that I have been surprised to learn that I am actually not as mature spiritually as I once thought! My flesh hates that reality! But when we realize the glory of the gospel is not in us, but in Jesus, we can find great relief.

The gospel is the great levelizer. A key implication for how we relate to one another and those around us. Makes us gracious because we have received grace.

The other implication shown here is care for others, specifically the poor.

Galatians 2:10 “Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” (ESV)

We don't know exactly what revelation brought this apostolic band to Jerusalem. But I have a suspicion that it was to remember the poor.

Acts 11:27–30 “Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. [28] And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). [29] So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. [30] And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.” (ESV)

Oh how we miss this in our day. We are so wrapped up with thinking the implications of the gospel are only related to politics or the mark of the beast or building individual fences that keep others out. Love of neighbor, care for the least. It's central to the kingdom and the key implication of the gospel.

Living in response to the grace we receive by rescuing others, helping, serving, healing, feeding. Like Jesus did, and the church before us has.

James 1:27 “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world.” (ESV)

There is a kingdom way of living, not in order to be saved but because we are.

"We obey not in the fear and insecurity of hoping to earn salvation, but in the freedom and security of knowing we are already saved in Christ. We obey in the freedom of gratitude." TK

This is the church living for the renewal of others and all things. That people would meet Jesus and that the peace of Christ would reign in our hearts and flow over into our spheres of influence.

“Come ye sinners, poor and needy
Weak and wounded, sick and sore;
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, love and power.”

So this gospel is unchanging, and it has implications that are really good for us and others. But it will also require us to stick with it. It is worth taking a stand for.

The Gospel is Worth Standing For

This is the heroic work of the church, to cherish and cling only to the unchanging gospel.

Galatians 2:4–5 “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)

Paul didn’t yield to the corrupting influence of false brothers (what an unfortunate title). He stood in order to preserve the gospel.

Churches can live the implications of the gospel differently, they can have unique views on lesser topics, but when we get the gospel wrong we are no church at all.

And even churches that claim to hold a gospel doctrine, must live with a gospel culture or we are in danger.

We know the gospel is unchanging because Paul stood for it. He didn’t back down to the rabble in Jerusalem. He won’t back down when famous Christians get it wrong. And we have the unchanging gospel because other saints throughout history have stood for it.

Martin Luther, the great reformer, at the Diet of Worms: Gives a full account of why the church has veered away from the grace of Christ (in both German and Latin!) and then is asked to recant.

“Since your most serene majesty and your high mightinesses require of me a simple, clear and direct answer, I will give one, and it is this: I cannot submit my faith either to the pope or to the council, because it is as clear as noonday that they have fallen into error and even into glaring inconsistency with themselves. If, then, I am not convinced by proof from Holy Scripture, or by cogent reasons, if I am not satisfied by the very text I have cited, and if my judgment is not in this way brought into subjection to God’s word, I neither can nor will retract anything; for it cannot be either safe or honest for a Christian to speak against his conscience. Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me! Amen.”

There are many things Christians find themselves being contentious about in our day - with each other - and so much of it is a waste, perhaps because we just like to argue. But the gospel is something to contend for. The gospel is something to live for and show to a watching world.

And we get to because we have been loved by God and experienced his grace in Christ!

The unchanging gospel is worth living and standing for.

I don’t know what ways we will have to take a stand (probably not in the ways we imagine from end times thrillers or political pundits). The attempts at innovation are endless. But I know the gospel, the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus for salvation of all who believe is good and worth standing for.

May we cling to this gospel, live from it, and stand for it.