

## Introduction

### Reflection

*Besides faith in Jesus, what is necessary for you to know God and have eternal life?* I once asked a man in our community about his faith and the gospel. He said that a person must have faith, be baptized, and do good works in order to be saved. This man is not alone in claiming that salvation is not by faith alone, but must be obtained by some form of good works.

For example, many of you have Catholic friends. *What does Catholicism teach about salvation by faith, works, or both?* **Council of Trent, Canon 9:** “If anyone says that the sinner is justified by faith alone, . . . let him be anathema.” **Council of Trent, Canon 24:** “If anyone says that the justice [righteousness] received is not preserved and also not increased before God through good works, but that those works are merely the fruits and signs of justification obtained, but not the cause of the increase, let him be anathema.” In other words, Catholicism teaches that, in addition to faith in Jesus, saving grace comes through good works, baptism, and membership in the Catholic church, ***not by faith alone***.

I once sat down with a couple of Latter-Day Saint missionaries and one of their elders to discuss faith. One of the topics we disagreed on was whether faith was necessary for salvation. According to the **Articles of Faith 1:3**, “We believe that through the atonement of Christ, all mankind may be saved, by obedience to the laws and ordinances of the gospel.” That is, in **addition to** Jesus’s atoning death, we must obey God’s commands in order to be saved.

### Context

The letter of Galatians was written to churches in various cities throughout the region of Galatia, churches that Paul established. Galatians teaches that we are ***saved*** by faith in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, with **nothing added**. Therefore, we should ***live*** by faith in Jesus through the power of the Holy Spirit, with **nothing added**.

Specifically, these churches were under pressure to submit to the **Mosaic Covenant**, although Scripture is clear that the New Covenant, God’s covenant relationship with His people through Christ, removed the obligation to the old covenant.

[Galatians 1](#) defends the truth of the gospel. The message of the gospel is that redemption is from God, not men ([Gal 1:1-5](#)). Furthermore, we should not accept any other gospel message because the true gospel message is from God, not men ([Gal 1:6-10](#)). Our knowledge, acceptance, and faith in the gospel is a work of God through the Holy Spirit ([Gal 1:11-24](#)).

## Overview

[Galatians 2:1-10](#) begins to introduce the false teaching in these churches. However, it does so by showing that this false teaching was not new. The churches of Judea (Jerusalem) and Syria (Antioch) have faced the same kind of false teaching that the Galatian churches were facing.

When false teachers tried to **add** to the gospel, those churches in Jerusalem and Antioch defended the truth of the gospel. Redemption is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. Just as the apostles, with the churches of Judea and Syria, refused to add to the gospel; likewise, the churches of Galatia should defend the truth of the gospel. When **we** encounter gospel messages that go beyond grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, **we** should defend the truth of the gospel.

Consider as you read these verses, *besides faith in Jesus, what is necessary for you to know God and have eternal life? Is the gospel enough? Is Jesus's atoning death sufficient?* [Galatians 2:1-10](#) teaches us to **add nothing to the gospel**.

## Theological conflict

In [Galatians 1:17-24](#), Paul separated himself from Jerusalem and the apostles. He did not visit Jerusalem or the apostles his first three years as a Christian ([Gal 1:17-18](#)). His first visit lasted only fifteen days ([Gal 1:18](#)).

[Galatians 2:1-10](#) describes Paul's visit to Jerusalem fourteen years later. There is considerable debate concerning how these verses align with the book of Acts. However, I believe that the details described in these verses refer to Paul's visit to Jerusalem in [Acts 15](#). Today, we will compare those two passages to get a better understanding of these verses.

### Barnabas and Titus

*Who were Paul's companions on this trip?* [Galatians 2:1](#) "1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me." **Barnabas** (Joseph) was a Levite from the island of Cyprus ([Acts 4:36](#)). He became a Christian and gained a good reputation among the Christians in Jerusalem and Antioch. Barnabas was one of the first to speak up for Paul, when other Christians still did not believe his faith was genuine ([Acts 9:26-27](#)).

**Barnabas and Paul** had been chosen as missionaries from the church at Antioch, Syria. They took John Mark, Barnabas's cousin (the author of *the Gospel of Mark*) ([Acts 12:25](#); cf. [Acts 15:37-38](#)). They established churches on the island of Cyprus and southern Galatia ([Acts 13-14](#)).

Scripture does not give a lot of information about **Titus**. [Gal 2:3](#) mentions he was a Greek, probably just meaning that he was not a Jew (cf. [Rom 1:16](#)). Titus was often entrusted by Paul to oversee churches. Paul sent Titus to Corinth after writing the letter of 1 Corinthians to the church ([2 Cor 7:5-7](#), [13](#); [8:6-23](#)). Paul sent Titus to Crete to oversee the churches and to appoint elders in each church ([Titus 1:5](#)).

Paul and Barnabas were Jews; Titus was a Gentile. Yet they all believed and proclaimed the same gospel message - redemption by faith in Jesus alone.

## Purpose

*Why did Paul travel to Jerusalem?* In [Acts 15](#), some men came to Antioch from Judea, teaching that Christians must be circumcised (i.e., they must keep the Mosaic covenant) to be saved ([Acts 15:1](#)). Paul and Barnabas debated them and the church sent Paul, Barnabas, and others to Jerusalem to discuss the issue with the apostles and elders ([Acts 15:2](#)). [Acts 15:1-2](#) “1 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.” 2 And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.”

In Jerusalem, Paul shared the gospel message he had proclaimed to the Gentiles (nations) ([Gal 2:2](#); [Acts 15:4](#)). This is the issue at stake in the churches of Galatia; people were misrepresenting the gospel ([Gal 1:6-9](#)). It is also important to remember that many people in the churches of Galatia were Gentiles. So, Paul is presenting to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem, the gospel message that is currently being challenged in those churches ([Gal 1:6-9](#)).

*What does Paul mean about verifying if he had “run in vain?”* Paul uses the same phrase in [Galatians 4](#) in response to those who have begun to embrace the teaching that they should return to the Mosaic covenant. “I am afraid I may have labored over you in vain” ([Gal 4:11](#)).

The apostles and elders, confirming the same gospel message as Paul, verified that he had not wasted his life and had not preached a false gospel or led people away from truth. [Galatians 2:2](#) does not specify if Paul wanted this confirmation or the church at Antioch wanted this confirmation. In [Acts 15](#), the church, not Paul, made the decision to send Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem.

## Opposition

### False Teaching

*Who were the false teachers?* **Notice** what Paul calls them in [Galatians 2:4](#) “4 Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in...” That is, they professed faith in Jesus, but they believed a

different gospel; therefore, they were not true believers. [Acts 15:5](#) identifies these opponents as Pharisees who professed faith in Jesus.

*What was their false teaching?* [Acts 15:5](#) “5 But some believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees rose up and said, “It is necessary to circumcise them and to order them to keep the law of Moses.”” These men were teaching that circumcision and faithfulness to the Mosaic law was necessary for redemption. This teaching continues today. Christians teach that we should observe Old Testament feasts, keep Old Testament dietary restrictions, etc.

*Why is this teaching something worth opposing?* The result is a removal of the freedom we have in Christ. [Galatians 2:4](#) “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—” The gospel is that Christ fulfilled covenant obedience on our behalf. We are free from sin and death through faith in Jesus. Returning to the old covenant is a return to slavery and a rejection of Christ ([Gal 3:23-4:10](#)).

### Do not yield

*Why is it important to defend the truth of the gospel?* Opposition to false teaching about the gospel is not just theological; eternal lives are at stake. [Galatians 2:5](#) “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.**”

False gospels lead people away from God. Jesus confronted similar teaching by the Pharisees. Although they claimed to be leading people to God, Jesus said the Pharisees did not know God and they were leading people into the same lost situation. [Matthew 23:15](#) “15 Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel across sea and land to make a single proselyte, and when he becomes a proselyte, you make him twice as much a child of hell as yourselves.”

## Support

### Added nothing

*What did the apostles and elders in Jerusalem add to Paul’s gospel proclamation?* [Galatians 2:6](#) “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.” They added **nothing** to his gospel. **Francis Schaeffer** wrote, “Nothing needs to be added to Christ’s finished work, and nothing *can* be added to Christ’s finished work” (*The Great Evangelical Disaster*).

We see an example of that in [Galatians 2:3](#) “3 But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.” Titus was recognized as a Christian by faith in Christ alone. When we add to the gospel, we reject Christ’s fulfillment of the gospel.

When we add works, whether circumcision, baptism, or good deeds, we reject Christ's work on our behalf. Paul later writes in [Galatians 6:14-15](#) "14 But far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world. 15 For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation."

When the Catholic church says that we are saved by faith, works, baptism, and church membership, they reject the sufficiency of Christ's death. When Latter-Day Saints say that a person is saved by a combination of Jesus's death and their good works, they reject the sufficiency of Christ's death. As Paul says in [Galatians 2:21](#), if we are saved in this way, by what we contribute, "then Christ died for no purpose."

### Different contexts

*What was distinct about Peter's and Paul's preaching?* The apostles and elders identified only one difference between Paul's preaching among the nations and their preaching among the Jews. The **context** was different, but the **message** was the same. [Galatians 2:7-8](#) "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),"

The apostles and elders in Jerusalem acknowledged that Paul had been entrusted with proclaiming the gospel to the Gentiles (uncircumcised) and Peter had been entrusted with proclaiming the gospel to the Jews (circumcised).

The main point here is that **the gospel has nothing to do with circumcision**. There was no reason to tell the Jews to stop being circumcised and no reason to tell the Gentiles they must be circumcised ([Rom 2:25-29](#)). Faith, not circumcision, determines the people of God. [Romans 3:29-30](#) "29 Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, 30 since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith." Faith alone determines our relationship with God.

This distinction between Paul and Peter describes the contexts in which these two men proclaimed Christ, not the message they proclaimed. In fact, Peter was the apostle to the Jews, yet God calls him to go preach to the Gentiles in [Acts 10](#). Paul was the apostle to the Gentiles, yet God also called him to preach to the Jews ([Acts 9:16](#)), which he frequently did.

The proclamation of the gospel should be contextualized, but not altered. Culture does not determine the message of the gospel, but it does influence **how** we proclaim it. [1 Corinthians 9:19-22](#) "19 For though I am free from all, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win more of them. 20 To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews. To those under the law I became as one under the law (though not being myself under the law) that I might win those under the law. 21 To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (not

being outside the law of God but under the law of Christ) that I might win those outside the law. 22 To the weak I became weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all people, that by all means I might save some.”

### Apostles' support

The apostles in Jerusalem supported Paul and Barnabas. [Galatians 2:9-10](#) “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.”

Paul refers to three men that seemed to be “pillars” in the church at Jerusalem. **James** was Jesus’s brother ([Gal 1:19](#)). There was an earlier apostle named James, the brother of John, who had been killed by Herod in [Acts 12:2](#). James, Jesus’s brother, did not believe that Jesus was the Christ ([John 7:5](#)) until after the resurrection ([1 Cor 15:7](#)). [Galatians 1:19](#) and [1 Corinthians 15:7](#) seem to indicate that Jesus had appointed James as an apostle. **Cephas** is Peter, one of Jesus’s original twelve apostles. **John** was also one of the original apostles.

In [Acts 15](#), after Peter and James were both outspoken about how the Gentiles should respond to the gospel. [Acts 15:7-11](#) “7 And after there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, “Brothers, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe. 8 And God, who knows the heart, bore witness to them, by giving them the Holy Spirit just as he did to us, 9 and he made no distinction between us and them, having cleansed their hearts by faith. 10 Now, therefore, why are you putting God to the test by placing a yoke on the neck of the disciples that neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? 11 But we believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will.””

After hearing Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, James cited Old Testament evidence that the Lord would save Gentiles ([Acts 15:13-18](#)). He argued that cause unnecessary difficulty for Gentiles who come to faith ([Acts 15:19](#)), but that they should be taught some things about living by faith in pagan cultures based on Scripture ([Acts 15:20-21](#)).

**Notice** that works are not totally absent. [Galatians 2:10](#) “... they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.” Works **follow** salvation; they are the work of the Holy Spirit in the life of a believer. They **follow** salvation, but do not **contribute** to salvation or to perseverance ([Jam 2:14-26](#); [Eph 2:8-10](#)).

### Conclusion

*Besides faith in Jesus, what is necessary for you to know God and have eternal life?* **Charles Spurgeon** said, “Let this be to you the mark of true gospel preaching - where **Christ is**

**everything**, and the creature is nothing; where it is salvation all of **grace** through the **work of the Holy Spirit** applying to the soul the precious **blood of Jesus.**" *Is Jesus's death sufficient **by itself** to atone for your sins?*

That is an important question for those of you who have not committed to faith in Jesus. Do not be misled to think that you must contribute anything to your relationship with God or your forgiveness of sins. Do not come to God offering your good works, your baptism, or your theology as justification for a relationship with Him. Come to God by faith in Christ, relying only on Jesus's death and God's grace and mercy to you.

Church, *what do we have to boast in?* Your salvation, your eternal life, your relationship with God, your righteousness, your holiness ... all of these come to us through Jesus's atoning death. May we daily praise God for the redemption we have in Christ ... **with nothing added.**

**Closing Scripture:** [Philippians 3:7-9](#) "7 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. 8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ 9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—"