

## GALATIANS 2 COMMENTARY SAMPLE – The Bible Knowledge Commentary (BKC)

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### DAY 1

*B. He was recognized by the apostles (2:1–10)*

While chapter 2 continues Paul's defense of his apostolic authority and the gospel he preached, he focused not on the source of his message but on its content. Further, whereas in chapter 1 he emphasized his independence from the other apostles, he now demonstrated that there was a basic unity between himself and them.

2:1. Much debate has centered on the question of the identification of this trip which Paul took to **Jerusalem** with **Barnabas**, a Jewish believer, and **Titus**, a Gentile believer. The Book of Acts mentions five Jerusalem visits made by Paul after his conversion: (1) the visit after he left Damascus (Acts 9:26–30; Gal. 1:18–20); (2) the famine visit (Acts 11:27–30); (3) the visit to attend the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1–30); (4) the visit at the end of the second missionary journey (Acts 18:22); (5) the final visit which resulted in Paul's Caesarean imprisonment (Acts 21:15–23:35). Scholars are divided primarily over whether Galatians 2:1 refers to the famine visit or to the Jerusalem Council visit. But in the context in which he is listing all contacts with human authorities, why would Paul omit reference to his second trip to Jerusalem? And if the reference is to the Council of Acts 15, why did not the apostle allude to its decrees? It seems this passage has the famine visit in view.

2:2. Paul went to Jerusalem on his second visit **in response to a revelation**. That is, he went because God directed him to, not because the Jerusalem leaders had summoned him or called him "on the carpet" for preaching to **the Gentiles**. The reference may well be to Agabus' prophecy of a famine which prompted Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem on a relief mission (cf. Acts 11:27–30). Paul seized this opportunity to consult with the other apostles **privately** concerning the message he was preaching to the Gentiles. This does not mean Paul sought their approval of its truth and accuracy, for he had received the gospel from God by revelation. Rather, he wanted them to consider its relationship to the gospel they were proclaiming. But if the Jerusalem leaders insisted on circumcision and other requirements of the Law for Gentile converts, Paul's labor (**running**) among the Gentiles was **in vain**. It was not that the apostle had any doubts or misgivings about the gospel he had preached for 14 years (Gal. 2:1), but that he feared that his past and present ministry might be hindered or rendered of no effect by the Judaizers.

### DAY 2

2:3–5. It now becomes apparent why Paul brought **Titus** along on this Jerusalem trip. He was a test case. Would the Jerusalem apostles force the rite of circumcision on a Gentile believer? Paul knew that both Jews and Gentiles are accepted by God through faith in Jesus Christ without any distinction and that the church should do the same. The apostle declared that this truth was affirmed in Jerusalem because Titus was **not ... compelled to be circumcised, even though he was a Greek**. But this victory did not come easily. Pressure to have Titus circumcised was brought to bear by certain **false brothers** (cf. 2 Peter 2:1). No doubt these were Judaizers, whose chief slogan is found in Acts 15:1: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." These "false brothers" ("sham Christians," NEB) were like spies or fifth-column agents who penetrated to search out weak areas of enemy positions. In this case they **infiltrated** (*pareisēlthon*; lit., "sneaked in alongside," used only here and in Rom. 5:20) the **ranks**, that is, they intruded without invitation into the apostles' private conference. Their goals were twofold: first, **to spy on** (*kataskopēsai*, used only here in the NT) **the freedom we have in Christ**. With hostile intent they purposed to observe the apostles' freedom from the Mosaic Law and from the legalism it engenders. Second, they intended to **make** Christians **slaves**. They wanted to bring believers back into bondage, to enslave them to the Law's rules and ceremonies. Specifically they strongly insisted that Titus be circumcised. But Paul stood absolutely firm because **the truth of the gospel** was at stake for the Galatians, and the entire Christian church. To impose circumcision on Titus would be to deny that salvation was by faith alone and to affirm that in addition to faith there must be obedience to the Law for acceptance before God. Thus the basic issue of the gospel was involved and Paul would not deviate or yield **for a moment**.

### DAY 3

2:6. Having completed his discussion of Titus, Paul resumed the narrative relating to his conference with the apostles in Jerusalem and declared that they **added nothing to his message**. They did not correct or modify Paul's message but recognized its divine source and affirmed its truth and completeness. But why did the apostle speak in what appears to be a derogatory manner about some of the Jerusalem leaders? In verse 2 he referred to them as "those who seemed to be leaders"; in verse 6 he described them as **those who seemed to be important**; and in verse 9 he finally named "James, Peter, and John" as "those reputed to be pillars." In view of the fact that Paul's purpose in this passage was to emphasize his unity with the apostles, it seems best to explain these allusions as stemming from the fact that the Judaizers, in order to disparage Paul, had made much of the Jerusalem leaders. While there may be irony in Paul's expressions, he declared that he was not awed by the past or present stations of James, Peter, and John. Indeed they endorsed Paul's message and received him as an equal.

2:7–9. Further, **James, Peter, and John** recognized that Paul had been divinely commissioned to preach **the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had to the Jews**. Thus Paul jolted the Judaists by declaring that the leaders in Jerusalem approved of his mission to the Gentiles.

It should be noted that Peter and Paul did not preach two gospels, as might be inferred from the KJV rendering, "the gospel of the uncircumcision" and "the gospel of the circumcision." There was one gospel though it was preached by different apostles to two distinct groups of people. The reason the apostles concluded that Paul's commission was equal to Peter's was the fact that God gave success to both as they preached. This was sealed by James, Peter, and John in their extending to Paul **and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship**. This was a sign of agreement and trust and an indication to all present that they endorsed the division of labor whereby the Jerusalem apostles were appointed to evangelize the Jews and Paul was entrusted to carry the **gospel to the Gentiles**.

### DAY 4

2:10. The only request from the leaders in Jerusalem was that Paul **remember the poor** which he affirmed he **was eager to do**. It had been concern for the poor which brought Paul to Jerusalem in order to bring them financial relief (cf. Acts 11:29–30). It was the same concern which motivated him on his third missionary journey to raise large welfare offerings for needy Christians in Jerusalem (cf. 1 Cor. 16:1–3). Such offerings would alleviate human suffering, but they would also demonstrate genuine concern on the part of Gentile Christians for Jewish Christians. This in turn would help promote unity and love among believers and help prevent the kinds of misunderstandings which were undermining the Galatian churches.

#### *C. He rebuked the reputed chief of the apostles (2:11–21)*

In this final historical incident Paul related how he found it necessary to oppose even Peter, the reputed chief of the apostles, for conduct which threatened to compromise the gospel. The contrast with the previous section is dramatic.

2:11. When Paul visited Jerusalem, Peter (and others) gave him "the right hand of fellowship"; but when **Peter visited Antioch**, Paul **opposed him to his face**. The time of Peter's trip to Antioch is not known. There is no reference to it in the Book of Acts, but perhaps the visit occurred soon after Paul, Barnabas, and Titus returned to Antioch from Jerusalem. At any rate Peter's conduct in Antioch produced a tense face-to-face confrontation between two Christian leaders. Paul felt compelled to rebuke and condemn Peter for his actions, thus defending the gospel and demonstrating again his own independence and equality as an apostle.

## DAY 5

2:12. On arrival at Antioch, Peter found Jewish and Gentile Christians fellowshiping together at mealtimes without regard to Jewish dietary laws. Because of the vision Peter had received at the house of Simon the tanner (Acts 10:9–15, 28), he felt free **to eat with the Gentiles**, and did so on a regular basis. While it lasted, this was a beautiful demonstration of the unity of Jew and Gentile in Christ. **But** a breach occurred when some arrived from Jerusalem who were shocked at Peter’s conduct. These emissaries **came from James** and belonged **to the circumcision** party, but it is doubtful that they had James’ endorsement. Nonetheless Peter was influenced by their presence and slowly but surely **began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles**. The verb tenses (imperf.) indicate a gradual withdrawal, perhaps from one joint meal a day, and then two; or it may be that he began a meal with Gentiles but finished it with only Jewish Christians. By such actions Peter in effect was teaching that there were two bodies of Christ, Jewish and Gentile. And that was heresy. But why did Peter create this breach? Not because of any change in theology, but simply out of fear. Once, after preaching to Gentile Cornelius, Peter courageously defended himself before the Jerusalem leaders (cf. Acts 11:18); but this time he capitulated to some Jewish friends.

2:13. Like falling dominoes the defection of Peter brought the defection of **the other Jews** and finally **even Barnabas**. The pressure must have been great for Barnabas to succumb because he was from Cyprus, a Gentile center, and was involved in a missionary program with Paul to reach Gentiles with the gospel. All of them—Peter, the other Jewish Christians, and Barnabas—were guilty of **hypocrisy** because while confessing and teaching that they were one in Christ with Gentiles, they were denying this truth by their conduct.

2:14. The response of Paul was electric. What Peter had initiated created a public scandal and therefore deserved a public rebuke. Further, the defectors **were not acting** according to **the truth of the gospel**, that is, they were denying by their actions the truth that on the basis of Jesus Christ’s death and resurrection Jews and Gentiles who believe are accepted equally by God. Paul therefore asked Peter before them all, “If you, who are a Jew, do not live like a Jew but like a Gentile, why on earth do you try to make Gentiles live like Jews?” (PH) It was a stinging rebuke. Peter’s response is not recorded. He stood condemned. He was acting contrary to his own convictions, was betraying Christian liberty, and was casting a slur on fellow believers. Such behavior needed this severe reprimand.

## DAY 6

2:15. But how far did the rebuke extend? Considerable discussion has centered on the question as to whether Paul’s direct remarks to Peter were limited to verse 14 or whether, as in the NIV, they continued to the end of the chapter. While it is impossible to determine, it would seem that Paul uttered more than one sentence in reproving Peter. The remaining verses of the chapter develop, then, the inconsistency between Peter’s behavior and his beliefs. At the same time they form a superb transition and introduction to chapters 3 and 4 in which Paul defended the key doctrine of justification by faith.

Paul’s argument was addressed to those who were **Jews by birth**, including Peter and himself, who in spite of their superior advantages were saved by faith. Why then bind the Law on **Gentile sinners** (said in irony because of Peter’s actions), who likewise were saved by faith in Christ?

2:16. In this verse, one of the most important in the epistle, the word *justified* occurs for the first time. It is a legal term, borrowed from the law courts and means “to declare righteous.” Its opposite is “to condemn.” But since people are condemned sinners and God is holy, how can people be justified? In answer, the apostle made a general declaration that negatively **man is not justified by observing the Law**, but positively, justification is **by faith in Jesus Christ**. This is a strong affirmation of Paul, Peter, and the rest—introduced by **We ... know**. It is followed by a statement in which Paul explained that he had put this doctrine to the test and validated it in his own experience (v. 16b). Finally, in verse 16c the apostle reaffirmed that justification is by faith and not by works (cf. Gen. 15:6).

2:17–18. Paul’s opponents argued, however, that since justification by faith eliminated the Law, it encouraged sinful living. A person could believe in Christ for salvation and then do as he pleased, having no need to do good works. Paul hotly denied the charge, especially noting that this made **Christ** the promoter of **sin**. On the contrary, if a believer would return to the Law after trusting Christ alone for salvation, that Law would only demonstrate that he was a sinner, **a lawbreaker**. Though Paul used the first person here, he clearly had in mind Peter, who by his act of withdrawing from Gentile fellowship was returning to the Law.

## DAY 7

2:19–20. Paul then distinguished himself from Peter, contrasting what he did with the Law with what Peter did with the Law. Paul described the transformation in a person who has come to God by faith in Christ in terms of a death and a resurrection. The concept is repeated in both verses and the reference in both cases is to a believer’s union with Christ in His death and resurrection. First, Paul stated that **through the Law** he **died to the Law**. The Law demanded death for those who broke it, but Christ paid that death penalty for all sinners. Thus the Law killed Him and those joined to Him by faith, freeing them to be joined to another, to **live for God** (cf. Rom. 7:4).

In Galatians 2:20 Paul enlarged on the meaning of verse 19. He “died to the Law” because he was **crucified with Christ**; he was able “to live for God” because **Christ** lived in him. Basic to an understanding of this verse is the meaning of union with Christ. This doctrine is based on such passages as Romans 6:1–6 and 1 Corinthians 12:13, which explain that believers have been baptized by the Holy Spirit into Christ and into the church, the body of all true believers. Having been thus united to Christ, believers share in His death, burial, and resurrection. Paul could therefore write, **I have been** “crucified with Christ” (lit., “I have been and am now crucified with Christ”). This brought death to the Law. It also brought a change in regard to one’s self: **and I no longer live**. The self-righteous, self-centered Saul died. Further, death with Christ ended Paul’s enthronement of self; he yielded the throne of his life to Another, to Christ. But it was not in his own strength that Paul was able to live the Christian life; the living Christ Himself took up His abode in Paul’s heart: **Christ lives in me**. Yet Christ does not operate automatically in a believer’s life; it is a matter of living the new life **by faith in the Son of God**. It is then faith and not works or legal obedience that releases divine power to live a Christian life. This faith, stated Paul, builds on the sacrifice of Christ **who loved us and gave Himself for us**. In essence Paul affirmed, “If He loved me enough to give Himself for me, then He loves me enough to live out His life in me.”

2:21. Summing up his case against Peter, Paul declared, **I do not set aside the grace of God**. The clear implication is that Peter and the others who followed him were setting aside God’s grace. The essence of grace is for God to give people what they have not worked for (cf. Rom. 4:4). To insist on justification or sanctification by works is to nullify the grace of God. Further, such insistence on legal obedience also means **Christ died for nothing**. If righteousness comes by keeping the Law, the Cross was a futile gesture, the biggest mistake in the universe.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Donald K. Campbell, “Galatians,” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 593–596.