

Dear Heavenly Father,

### *Praise*

Paul said of Jesus, “[He] gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever” (Gal 1:4). I praise you today for your Son, Jesus Christ. He gave himself to pay the penalty for my sins, and he delivered me from the darkness of this world! I join with Paul and say, ‘Glory to God forever and ever!’ Praise the Lord!

### *Today in Your Word*

Today you told me about the first theological crisis in the early church. When Paul and Barnabas returned to the church at Syrian Antioch, they told everyone how God had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles in Galatia. They stayed there with the disciples, and while they were there, Peter came to visit the church. He ate with the Gentile believers and enjoyed their company. However, he “drew back and separated himself” when “certain men came from James.” These men began teaching the brothers: “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). Peter’s actions were so influential that “the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy” (Gal 2:13). Since Peter’s hypocrisy was a matter of public record, Paul confronted him publicly: “If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?” He then condemned the tacit approval Peter’s hypocrisy had given to the false teaching that circumcision was necessary for salvation. ‘We Jews know,’ Paul said, ‘that a person is justified by faith in Christ, not by works of the law. If we are not justified by faith in Christ—if we also need to be circumcised to be saved—then Christ’s work has left us in a sinful state, and He is the minister of sin! May it never be!’ (cf. Gal 2:16–17). Barnabas was persuaded by Paul’s argument, and he joined Paul in debating the men who taught the need for circumcision. Together, they “had no small dissension and disputation with them.” Finally, with the debate in deadlock, the church agreed to send Paul, Barnabas and some of the others to Jerusalem to ask “the apostles and elders about this question.” However, before Paul and Barnabas left, word reached Paul from the new churches in Galatia. To his dismay, he discovered that the Galatians were deserting Christ and “turning to a different gospel” (Gal 1:6)—a gospel of Christ-plus-circumcision. Paul wanted to respond to this crisis immediately, and his only option was to write a letter. Paul had several goals in mind as he wrote Galatians. First, *he wanted to show that the “other gospel” of Christ-plus-circumcision was heresy* (Gal 1–2). He did this by declaring that the gospel he preached came directly from Christ: “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man’s gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ” (Gal 1:11–12). Paul’s point was this: ‘If my gospel is from Christ—if it’s the true gospel—then any other gospel is false and thus heretical.’ Second, *he wanted to persuade the Galatians to return to the true gospel of salvation by faith in Christ alone* (Gal 3–4). He did this by reminding them of their original conversion experience, and by showing them that the Scriptures confirmed salvation by faith in Christ alone. I look forward to tomorrow’s reading where you will tell me the rest of what Paul had to say to the disciples in Galatia!

### *Reflection*

The heresy of “Christ-plus-something-else” in order to be saved is still around today. I may not struggle with the issue of circumcision like the Galatians did, but anytime I depend on something more than faith in Christ for my salvation, I’m falling into the same trap.

### *Request*

Father, help me remember that I’m saved by grace through faith alone, and that I *stay* saved by grace through faith alone. My obedience demonstrates my love for you, but my obedience doesn’t keep me saved.

### *Thanksgiving*

Thank you for the Law, which found me guilty as a law-breaker, imprisoned me in sin, and held me captive so that I could inherit the promise *only through faith in Jesus Christ* (Gal 3:22–23). Hallelujah for the blood of the Lamb!

In Jesus’ name, Amen.

*Suggested Hymn: “Crucified with Christ My Savior” – Albert B. Simpson.*

*Meditation Verse: Galatians 2:20–21.*