

Paul Continues to Defend His Apostolic Authority

Galatians 2:1-10

Galatians 2:1-10: *“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me.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.³ Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.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),⁵ to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.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.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 Peter⁸ (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles),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.¹⁰ They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.”*

Background Notes

Setting the date for the writing of the epistle to the Galatians depends on which visit to Jerusalem was in view in the first few verses of this chapter. Fourteen years after the brief visit to Jerusalem that was described in Galatians 1:18-19, Paul again went to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. The book of Acts mentioned two visits to Jerusalem that would fit this description: one in Acts 11, and the other in Acts 15, when Paul went to Jerusalem for the Church council after his first missionary journey. If Paul was referring to the Acts 11 visit, then Galatians was written as early as 48 or 49AD, and thus it would be Paul's first written epistle. If, on the other hand, Paul was speaking of the Acts 15 visit, then Galatians was probably written in the mid 50sAD.

A case can be made for either visit. The reference to helping the poor (v10) may be an indication that the visit to Jerusalem mentioned in Galatians 2 was the Acts 11 visit, because Paul and Barnabas brought famine relief to Jerusalem on that occasion.

I tend to favor the early date, because if the Acts 15 visit to Jerusalem was in view here, it is strange that Paul made no mention in this epistle of the important decisions made by the Church council. That council in Jerusalem was concerned

with the very subject of the epistle to the Galatians - that salvation is by grace through faith alone, not by works of the Law – and that salvation is the same for the Gentiles as for the Jews. Yet the good decisions of the Jerusalem council are nowhere mentioned in this entire epistle.

Regardless of the date of this epistle, the basis for salvation is the same - then and today. Salvation is through Jesus Christ alone - not through accomplishing good works or observing religious rituals. Whether this human effort is baptism, or good works, or giving money, or whatever - that's not how you get saved!

If you think that you have to clean up your act to become a Christian and then try to do the best you can - that's not what the Bible teaches! Salvation is a **gift**. Jesus did it all. You don't work your way to salvation. You come as you are, receive the gift of salvation, and then you begin to serve the Lord.

Doctrinal Points

1. The right use of Christian liberty is important in Christian living.

In verse 4, Paul spoke of *"false brethren"* who had infiltrated the early Church *"to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage."* These false teachers were the Pharisaic Judaizers who were undermining Paul's authority and wrongly teaching that salvation required works as well as faith. Paul did not back down to the arguments of the Judaizers in the slightest - not *"even for an hour."*

Titus was a test case here. Titus, a Gentile believer, was not circumcised. Circumcision was a ritual of the Old Testament Jewish Law that the Judaizers said was necessary for salvation. Must a Gentile believer be circumcised as an additional requirement for salvation? "No way!" said the apostle Paul.

It's interesting that Paul had Timothy circumcised before he joined the apostle Paul on his second missionary journey: *"Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek" (Acts 16:3).*

What was the difference? Why did Timothy get circumcised, but not Titus? Was Paul inconsistent? No, this is an example of the proper use of Christian liberty. Circumcision was not necessary for salvation, but on the other hand, there was nothing wrong with being circumcised. But if Titus, a Gentile, had been circumcised, it would have been seen as a capitulation to the demands of the Judaizers. Even more importantly, however, the truth of the all-sufficiency of the sacrifice of Christ and the glorious gospel would have been distorted and compromised. As far as Paul was concerned, he would have run or labored in vain (v2).

In Timothy's situation the truth of the gospel was not at stake. Timothy had not been circumcised as a baby, even though his mother was Jewish, because his father was a Gentile. Paul had Timothy circumcised to emphasize his "Jewishness," because in their missionary travels they were seeking to reach unbelieving Jews with the gospel, and he did not want to offend them by having an uncircumcised Jewish man on the team. This was the proper use of Christian liberty.

Here's a present day illustration. Suppose I were a missionary in a culture where the people were vegetarian for religious reasons. The Bible teaches that I'm free to eat meat because eating meat has nothing at all to do with salvation. But I may still choose to restrict my Christian liberty in this area and not to eat meat - for the sole purpose of not offending the vegetarian people I'm trying to reach with the gospel. As Paul said, *"I've become all things to all men that I might by all means save some"* (1 Corinthians 9:22).

If, on the other hand, some legalistic Christians from that culture were to teach that you cannot be saved unless you become a vegetarian, or that your salvation is in question if you choose to eat meat, then I would purposely eat a hamburger in public so that the truth of the gospel would not be not compromised. Salvation is by faith – not by religious dietary rules and regulations, or by religious rituals, or by any kind of good works!

Our Lord used this same principle when He purposely healed on the Sabbath - in plain sight of the legalistic Pharisees! The proper understanding and use of Christian liberty is important in Christian living.

2. The "right hand of fellowship" is important in Christian service.

Verse 7 & 9: *"...when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter... 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."*

Remember that Paul's overall purpose or argument in this section of Galatians was to show that he received "his gospel" (the gospel that he preached) directly from the Lord Himself. He didn't receive it from the "Mother Church" in Jerusalem, or from the other apostles, or from any other source.

But when he finally did go up to Jerusalem, Paul spent some quality time in private sessions with the "pillars of the church," Cephas (Peter), James, and John (v9). And these men were in total agreement with the gospel that Paul preached. In fact, they gave the apostle Paul *"the right hand of fellowship"* when they realized that God had raised Paul up for the specific purpose of bringing the gospel to "the uncircumcised," the Gentiles, just as Peter was chosen to bring the gospel to the circumcised, the Jews.

Paul was not playing favorites when he met with the Jerusalem church leaders (v6). But he did appreciate their “right hand of fellowship,” because this showed that they were in full agreement with his ministry. This gesture affirmed that Peter and Paul both taught ***the same gospel – salvation by faith in Christ alone.***

The “right hand of fellowship” is an expression that means you approve of and are in agreement with a fellow believer’s message and ministry. The right hand of fellowship is important in preaching and teaching, and it’s important in other Christian service as well. It’s important both to give it and to receive it. And it’s also very important that ***false*** teachers are ***not*** given the right hand of fellowship!

I appreciate the fact that the church where I’m giving this Galatians Talk has extended the right hand of fellowship to me. It’s important for other believers to know that this church is in fellowship with me and agrees with the message I preach. The right hand of fellowship is important in Christian service.

Practical Application

Let’s be *eager* to remember the poor!

Are we as eager to help the poor as the apostle Paul was? The Lord Jesus said, “*The poor you always have with you and you may do them good whenever you wish.*” The apostle Paul was not only eager to preach the gospel - he was eager to help the poor as well. We too should be eager to do both. There are unbelievers all around us who need to hear the gospel, and there are needy people all around us who need our help. Recently, at Emmaus Bible College, we were able to send financial help to the mother of a foreign student, and this was a great blessing for all of us!

Notice that helping the poor was an important aspect of the apostle Paul’s life. In Galatians 1 we saw how adamant he was that the gospel be proclaimed properly, and that it not be distorted. That’s our mission as well. But in verse 10 Paul emphasized that helping the poor should also be an important (and convicting) part of the Christian’s life. Paul was eager to help the poor as well as to preach the gospel - and we should be, too.

There’s got to be a good balance here, because we tend go to one extreme or the other. We can be very intent on preaching the gospel (and rightly so) - but as a result we forget about the needs of the poor. On the other hand, we can be so concerned about the needs of the poor that we spend all our time on meeting needs - and never evangelize!

We’ve got to do both. The Lord did both. Paul did both. And we should follow their example. Let’s be *eager* to remember the poor!