

Studies in Galatians

Chapter Two

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Paul continues his biography.

Gal 2:1 “Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also.

Gal 2:2 And it was because of a revelation that I went up; and I submitted to them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but I did so in private to those who were of reputation, for fear that I might be running, or had run, in vain.”

The time of fourteen years is probably since his conversion although some think that it dates from the time that he went to first see Peter. The book of Acts relates four occasions of Paul visiting Jerusalem so which trip is he talking about here? The first was not long after his conversion (Acts 9:26-30). His second trip was to take gifts to the poor who had succumbed to a severe famine. His third trip (Acts 11:27-30) was one that we spent a good bit of time discussing in our study of Acts and that involved the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15). His fourth trip (Acts 21-28) involved his being arrested and then sent to Rome. He probably means eleven years after his first visit with Peter for this visit since it was three years after his conversion that he made that trip to see Peter for fifteen days. Then this trip must be his third trip to Jerusalem.

Titus was a Gentile and a Christian and the chief overseer in Crete. Paul had assigned him the challenge of governing the churches there (Titus 1:9). Paul seems to have taken him along since he had not been circumcised and his witness would be a strong endorsement that Christians did not have to obey the law and custom of the Jews. Paul went in response to a revelation God gave him about the growing problem of the upsurge against “sola fide”.

Paul knew that he had been taught by Jesus so he was not worried that he had been taught incorrectly but he was willing to submit himself to the authority of those who had walked with Jesus. He followed correct procedure in meeting with them privately so that there would be no attempt by anyone to be a crowd pleaser. I doubt that any of them would have been so tempted but such is a good example for us. In telling them about the Gospel message that he preached to the Gentiles he surely would have told them of the necessary and sufficient work of Jesus Christ for the only escape from the wrath of God.

John 3:36 “He who believes in the Son has eternal life; but he who does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.”

He had been preaching for 14 – 18 years depending upon the dates chosen for this visit. So he was not frightened that he might have a wrong understanding of the Gospel. He was fearful of the effect that the Judaizers were having on people and that he might not be supported by the Apostles.

Gal 2:3 “But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.

Gal 2:4 But it was because of the false brethren who had sneaked in to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage.

Gal 2:5 But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.”

Paul wanted to make the point that God had accepted Titus totally on the basis of the Gospel and without any works including circumcision. Titus was so firm in his salvation state that he was not even tempted to allow the false brethren to make him become circumcised. It was quite a testimony to Titus’s faith that in front of all of these people he stood firm in his belief that anyone presenting an additional requirement to Christianity involving Jewish works was presenting a false gospel. These Judaizers seemed to be pretending to have been sent by the Apostles but Paul identified them for what they were: people pretending to be Christians and trying to damage the early Christian system. Paul noted that he and his team did not yield to these false teachers at all. It was critical to Paul that the Gospel remain pure and the church at Galatia needed to firmly understand the importance of a pure Gospel message.

It is important to note that it is not a sin to be circumcised as long as the person understands that such does not afford him any special righteousness. What one eats or drinks is also not a sin although some taught that a Christian should be a vegetarian. A Christian can be a vegetarian as long as he knows that such is not gaining him any special righteousness (! Cor 8:8).

Gal 2:6 “But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality) -- well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me.

Gal 2:7 But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised

Gal 2:8 (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles),

Gal 2:9 and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we might go to the Gentiles, and they to the circumcised.

Gal 2:10 They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do.”

Paul then returned to the validation of himself as an Apostle. He acknowledged his respect for the office of Apostle so that he did present his understanding of the Gospel to them and Peter, James, and John all validated his knowledge of the true message of salvation purely on the merits of the finished work of Jesus Christ. The false teachers were trying to place the Apostles in authority over Paul and they were claiming that they had the blessing of the Apostles. Paul made it clear that such was not the case. God set the Apostles in their positions rather than their earning such a position. God shows us

many people in His Word who were chosen by Him for certain tasks but who later fell away and showed that they were really not perfect in themselves. Examples include David, Samson, Saul and others. God also rejected some firstborns whom the world would have chosen such as Esau and Ishmael. The Apostles must be respected because they state the words of God and not on their own merits. We are always tempted to worship the created rather than the creator.

Paul says that his discussion with the Apostles was not an argument for they could not teach him anything since he had also been taught by Jesus Christ. The only message that they could tell him was that he should remember the poor and Paul spent a lot of his time raising funds for the poorer churches so he was already involved in that work.

Gal 2:11 “But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned.

Gal 2:12 For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision.

Gal 2:13 And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy.”

This event was critical in the history of the church for if this hypocrisy had been allowed to perpetuate the congregations the result could have been a split in the church. Anyone can sin and we do not expect anyone to be perfect except Jesus. But when a Christian does sin he needs to repent and make any corrections needed. Peter was not sinning when he ate and drank with the Gentiles and he knew that from a direct teaching by God.

Acts 10:9 “And on the next day, as they were on their way, and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray.

Acts 10:10 And he became hungry, and was desiring to eat; but while they were making preparations, he fell into a trance;

Acts 10:11 and he beheld the sky opened up, and a certain object like a great sheet coming down, lowered by four corners to the ground,

Acts 10:12 and there were in it all kinds of four-footed animals and crawling creatures of the earth and birds of the air.

Acts 10:13 And a voice came to him, "Arise, Peter, kill and eat!"

Acts 10:14 But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."

Acts 10:15 And again a voice came to him a second time, "What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.”

But Peter demonstrated great hypocrisy when he removed himself from the Gentiles when fellow Jews came. We see the great danger in this event because even Barnabas was deceived by this behavior. If Paul had not directly interfered and corrected Peter a great problem could have developed in the early church.

Gal 2:14 “But when I saw that they were not straightforward about the truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas in the presence of all, "If you, being a Jew, live like the Gentiles and not like the Jews, how is it that you compel the Gentiles to live like Jews?

Gal 2:15 "We are Jews by nature, and not sinners from among the Gentiles;

Gal 2:16 nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ, and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law shall no flesh be justified.”

Readers please think about some similar events that may happen today. For an example, pretend that you are a white man in a diner in Alabama in the late 1950’s. You go and sit and start talking with some black people and you are enjoying the conversation. Then some other white people come in and stand and look at you sitting there talking with the black people. You then stand and pretend to not be having anything to do with the black people so that the white people will not become upset at you. You can take this analogy to just about any type of people who have not been respected and many are still having problems fitting into society.

I was at a meeting of the Fellowship of Christian Employees at KSU one time and before we started our meeting a person that I knew and did not think was a Christian walked into the room. He quickly sensed not fitting in and asked me if this was the AAUP meeting. I said no, it is the Fellowship of Christian Employees meeting. He looked at me like I was a vermin and said that he definitely was in the wrong room. If I had acted like Peter I would have said, “Wow, I also am in the wrong room!” I did not say that. Many people at KSU knew that I was a Christian and many times I was turned away from advancements and fellowships because of my strong beliefs. If I had acted as Peter I am sure that I would have “advanced” further in administration and “importance” at the secular university. But I refused to turn away from my convictions.

I am reminded of what Jesus said that seems related to this event:

Mark 8:38 “For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

Since Jesus has accepted all people into His kingdom, when we dissociate ourselves from one of those people we are also acting as being ashamed of Jesus.

If Paul had left Peter alone and not confronted him then there would be a “church” for Gentiles and a “church” for Jews but no true church. The problem was that severe and Paul addressed it properly as an example for us today.

Paul addressed Peter with the statement that what he was doing before the Jews came upon the scene was correct. He – a Jew – was living in the standards of the Gentiles and not with the standards of the Jews. Living in that manner how was it possible for him to

insist that the Gentiles must live like the Jews? He showed Peter how inconsistent he was in wanting to force the Jewish laws and customs on the Gentiles when he was living without those same laws and customs when he was with the Gentiles.

Paul went on to say that he and Peter were Jews and they were not sinners from the Gentiles. But they both knew that all the laws and customs of their people were of no use in being accepted before the throne of God. Even they as great Jews must trust in the works of Jesus for their salvation.

Gal 2:17 "But if, while seeking to be justified in Christ, we ourselves have also been found sinners, is Christ then a minister of sin? May it never be!

Gal 2:18 "For if I rebuild what I have once destroyed, I prove myself to be a transgressor.

Gal 2:19 "For through the Law I died to the Law, that I might live to God.

Gal 2:20 "I have been crucified with Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and delivered Himself up for me.

Gal 2:21 "I do not nullify the grace of God; for if righteousness comes through the Law, then Christ died needlessly.""

The Gentiles were declared sinners because they lived outside of the law. Now if Peter and Paul claimed to be justified in Jesus but were caught living like the Gentiles then they would be declared "sinners". Thus in the eyes of the Jews the life in Christ was a life in sin! Paul has to answer such an awful accusation and he says: "Absolutely not!" If Paul now would go back after being regenerated and believing in Jesus Christ and recommitted himself to all the laws and customs of the Jewish teachings he would then be a transgressor. The Jews looked at Peter and Paul as great sinners because they now could eat and drink with the Gentiles but actually it was because the righteousness of Jesus had been imputed to them that they could now associate with the Gentiles without being made "unclean". In Christ the law has been destroyed as a way to become righteous before God. Therefore we cannot bring it back into the picture. The situation of people being righteous before God has been turned upside down.

Ryken⁵ points out that at least four things were nailed to the cross of Calvary.

- 1.) Jesus himself was nailed to the cross.
- 2.) The public announcement that Jesus was the King of the Jews was nailed to the cross.
- 3.) The debt of sin was nailed to the cross (Col 2:13-14).
- 4.) We were nailed to the cross. His story becomes our story. We are totally united with Christ.

Paul is saying here that we no longer have a life of our own. This teaching is completely in antithesis to the teaching of the world today. Today people are obsessed with themselves. The important concepts are self-esteem, self-improvement, self-fulfillment, self-indulgence, etc. For us to have a healthy self-image is to see ourselves in Christ. But a Christian is no longer to be totally consumed with his own pleasure and happiness. The meaning in life for the Christian is what it means to Jesus. God offers us

righteousness, peace, and joy (all in Him, not in us). God has given us a new life to live and it will be one that has meaning throughout eternity. A life lived totally for here ends here and the hereafter will be forever as the self-oriented person desired and that is an eternity out of the presence of God and into an eternity of punishment.

What a wonderful thought that Jesus loved me so much that He died for me and that He nailed my sinful self on the cross with Him so that I could live a life here and now for and with Him.

Paul also goes on to say that if there were any other way for man to become righteous before God then Jesus died needlessly and what a travesty that would be. Plan A has been the only plan since before the foundation of the world.

References

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