



## Part 3 – The Fight for Freedom

### Galatians 2:1-10

In this section Paul continues the autobiography he began in 1:10. Paul's life was not built upon a desire to please people (1:10). And the section beginning in chapter two supports this. Both his calling as an apostle and the gospel he preached were not granted by man but given by a revelation of Jesus Christ. Indeed, though he visited Peter three years after his conversion, Paul did not have any significant contact with the other apostles for fourteen years (1:18-20). But this is not to suggest that Paul was a maverick. His calling and message were affirmed by the other apostles and he went

on to have a close connection especially to Peter, James, John, and the Jerusalem church. So great was Paul's loyalty to the Jerusalem church that he labored regularly for the alleviation of their poverty.

### 1. The gospel proclaimed

Vv. 1-2

- Paul did not have any significant contact with the other apostles until fourteen years after his conversion. Nevertheless, when he was able he traveled to Jerusalem in order to "set before them the gospel" that he had been preaching. Let us take at least two lessons from this:

#### A) The apostolic gospel was unbroken

- After fourteen years of preaching without any interaction with the other apostles (with the exception of Peter early on) Paul and the other apostles were preaching the same message of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. This is due to the supernatural calling shared by the apostles. Having been appointed directly by the risen Jesus so too were they given the same gospel to proclaim.

#### B) Proper respect for God-given authority

- It is clear that Paul did not have an attitude of inferiority toward his fellow apostles (there were no super-apostles, after all). Nevertheless, Paul respected that the others were appointed, just as he was, by the same Lord. And recognizing that he was not an island unto himself but grafted into the church he was sent by way of divine revelation to present his message to the scrutiny of the others. Very leader, no matter how mature, is still a sinner struggling through the long process of sanctification. Though we do not venerate any human leader, we are certainly called to render proper respect to those leaders whom God has appointed whether in civic life or in the body of Christ (Romans 13:1; Hebrews 13:17).
- The gospel preached by Paul and the other apostles was a declaration of freedom. The impossible burden of accruing sufficient merit to be justified before God is answered by the shed blood of Jesus. While the law of God is good and pure, it was never intended to save sinners. It was meant, in part, to teach us the hopelessness of depending upon obedience to bring about salvation. Grace, unlike law, brings freedom. It frees the sinner from the condemnation of the law. The gospel frees us from the unending cycle of amassing enough merit to satisfy a God whose perfect standard for justice must be met in himself.

### 2. The gospel defended

Vv. 3-5

- Paul presents Titus as a living example of the freedom of the gospel. Titus was a Gentile Christian who had not received circumcision. For the Judaizers (the "false brothers"), this was scandalous. They held that receiving the sign of circumcision was required if one was to be justified before God. They preached a salvation that was the fruit of both God's grace and human merit. They held that adherence to the ceremonial laws given to Israel under the covenant with Moses, were necessary for salvation. In this they misunderstood the purpose of those ceremonial laws. Those regulations were given as "types" pointing generations toward Christ and his work on the cross. They were never meant as means by which God's people could gain merit to be added to their justification. But now these false brothers were insisting on just such an arrangement.

- Titus was accepted just as he was not only by Paul but by the other apostles as well thus confirming the unity of their message. Gentile Christians would not need to submit to circumcision. They would not be required to submit to any of the traditional Jewish rites in order to be counted as fellow Christians. The ethnic and ceremonial dividing line between Jewish and Gentile Christians was being brought down by the message of the apostles.
- By identifying those who were adding works of the law to the calculus of justification as “false brothers” (vs. 4), Paul leaves no room for the notion that peace can be made with those who alter the gospel. Don’t miss the significance of Paul’s judgment in this matter. Those teaching the necessity of circumcision claimed to be Christians. They agreed that Jesus was the Messiah. They agreed that Jesus shed his blood for sinners and rose from the grave. For many contemporary evangelicals, those facts would render any other differences insignificant. And yet the apostle – the emissary of the Lord Jesus – assigns to them the strong pejorative *pseudadelphous* (“false brothers”).
- Paul shows us here that false teachers who claim to be disciples of Jesus can worm their way into the church and undermine the very thing that gives freedom. Before long freedom in Christ is traded for bondage to laws and ceremonies which Christ himself fulfilled. Paul holds forth Titus in part to refute the false brothers and their teaching that circumcision and the other practices of the ceremonial law were required if one was to be justified before God. Such a notion obliterates the gospel itself. There is no way to make peace with a false gospel. Distortions to the gospel must be identified and refuted.
  - \* **On circumcision and baptism:** The false brothers had not comprehended the radical change wrought by Jesus (Sadly, they had not even properly understood the function of God’s law). The completed work of Christ required a change in the covenant sign. For the faithful, circumcision illustrated the removal of the sinful flesh by the shedding of blood. For those who bore the sign but rejected the faith, their circumcision was a sign of judgment, illustrating the fact that they had been cut off from God and his people. Likewise, the sign of baptism given to believers and their children illustrates the washing away of sin. But for those who bear the sign but do not believe, the sign of baptism illustrates the waters of God’s judgment. Under both the former sign of circumcision and the new and continuing sign of baptism, the requirement of faith is the same. Both signs signify a salvation that is by grace through faith alone.

### 3. A gospel for all people

Vv. 6-9

- Paul is not diminishing the other apostles. Rather he is answering back to the false brothers in Galatia who were claiming Paul was not an apostle. The language Paul uses here is not meant to show disrespect for the others but to reflect his equality with them. He was not a lesser apostle. On the contrary, Paul enjoyed the same divine commission from the risen Christ. Sure enough, the others recognized the authenticity of Paul’s apostleship (vs. 9).
- There was full agreement among the apostles that the gospel was a message to the whole world. It was meant for Jew and Gentile alike. This translated across all boundaries and into all cultures. The common experience of sin and brokenness renders every individual in need of the message of salvation through faith alone in Christ.

### 4. A gospel implication

Vs. 10

- One of the characteristic features of Paul’s ministry was his care for the impoverished Christians in Jerusalem (a crisis which had impacted that church since its founding). Sprinkled across several epistles are mentions of his collection of funds for that church.
- Caring for the poor is not the gospel. Giving generously for the good of others cannot and will not contribute to one’s justification before God. But generosity for the sake of others is indeed an obvious implication of the gospel. Christian generosity is to be an expression of God’s generosity toward us in Christ. Paul makes this very point to the church in Rome: “He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?” (8:32). To the church at Corinth he wrote: “For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich” (8:9).