

GALATIANS 1:18-2:14	20
REVIEW – OUTLINE WORKSHEET	21
PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 2:15-21	22

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*“We have a right to be confident and firm
in our faith, unassailable before the barbs,
the cynicism or the disregard of men.”*

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It all begins rather innocently. You read verse 13 and have no notion really that you’ve been launched into one of the slickest and most effective apologies ever put from pen to page. When you have completed the studies of chapters 1 and 2, the “personal section” of Paul’s letter, you will have an opportunity by diagram to observe the remarkable ability of Paul to present his case and hammer it home. Some of what we study in the next few weeks will comprise that diagram.

Paul has quietly insinuated the two sides of his argument already in verses 11 and 12. The point he is making in answer to the Judaizers’ claim that Paul’s teaching lacked a little since his apostleship is suspect, is that his teaching, on the one hand, his Gospel, was not from men, and that, on the other hand, it came directly from God. For 26 verses he is going to expand, point by point, on those two sides of the same coin.

In Galatians 1:13 he starts. Paul’s Gospel was not from men. Everybody knew of his relationship with the churchmen of his day. He had been a persecutor of the church, of the Gospel, without peer. Paul admits to “wasting” the church. Television detective stories use the word “waste” as a synonym for murder. It’s a thought. Murder has in it an element of utter pillage, a moldering and squander which is ultimate. Paul sees his “persecutor days” as having, among other things, squandered the glorious gift called church. Well, if the sentence works one way, it ought to work the other.

If persecution of the church constitutes a waste (KJV), doesn’t waste of the church constitute persecution? There is a habit, sometimes self-righteous, in the church to focus upon its poorest aspects. Instead of making the most of its attributes, some tend to minimize its efforts to move with vigor into the world and to bring to the world what it alone can bring, by engaging in grand battles over petty causes. Some waste opportunities and dissipate

the church's strength in things that matter least. In a sense, over time, that constitutes a persecution of the church and its Lord. Just as Paul calls his persecution a waste of the church, current waste of the church constitutes an internal persecution of it and unhappily renders the church far less effective than it could or ought to be.

Paul's background as a persecutor and destroyer of the church is a strong indication that his Gospel did not have men as its source. He would have been the last one to whom men would have delivered and entrusted the Gospel. But his history of zealous pharasaism (v. 14) further proves the point. The Judaizers complained, albeit politely, that Paul's Gospel lacked something, something which a little old-fashioned law and order could provide. Paul's Gospel, they said, was too free. A few well-placed requirements would give a little balance to things.

Well, if anyone would know how, or be inclined to, sprinkle liberally with rules and regulations and requirements, a Pharisee would. These were the fellows who, as a matter of conviction, wore their toga sashes thus and measured the hem from fringe to foot just so. Their prayers were constructed of prescribed parts and at the end of the day they hauled out the abacus to computerize their piety in terms of religious formulas fulfilled. And Paul had a 3.9 average over the years, and graduated "cum laude." His Gospel, nonetheless, avoided canons and requirements like a little boy avoids soap. He saw rules as totally destructive. He certainly did not come up with his dread of the law out of the background of his past.

Not only does Paul's background indicate that his Gospel is not from men. Skipping to the other side of the argument, his background strongly indicates his Gospel came directly from God. There is that call and the unfaltering purpose of God for his life (v.15). He was selected from birth by God to deliver the Gospel to the Gentiles. Paul was well enough acquainted with himself to know that his life had taken turns and twists which it would never have done unless some destiny

were tugging at him. That destiny was God. Tracing it back, you could see God's hand on the steering wheel all the way back to the day he was born.

That's a fascinating exercise, to sit in the quiet under a reading lamp late at night, or to pace the worn spot in the rug where you pray, and to think: how did I get to this spot in my life, in my faith, in my conviction? The last thing you will claim is that you chose to set off for the point where you are, that it's all the result of your carefully contrived plan of action. Someone else has been writing the plot, creating the scenarios, and that someone is God. That's good news. God gets us where He wants us to go. He, of course, "meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive" (Gen. 50:20).

Paul's immediate actions following his conversion are telling arguments in proof of his point. After his experience on the Damascus Road, Paul headed off to a place where he could be alone to think things over (1:16-17). In particular, he stayed away from Jerusalem where men taught about things religious. He held no conference with humans. He purposely avoided everyone. On the other side of all that solitude he came up with the glorious Gospel of grace. Paul's argument is that that background, his Arabian contemplation (v. 17), strongly suggest that God revealed Jesus to him.

GALATIANS 1:18-2:14

There is a deep-rooted question in the minds of some these days about the value of church conventions. There are those who believe that just as much could have been accomplished frequently by prayer and labor and, at least on some occasions, some deterioration of purpose and relationships might have been avoided if everyone had simply checked in by mail. Nevertheless, no one can deny that the conference style, the convention mode, has unarguable precedence in the Christian Church. Those early Christians, too, were forever meeting (Acts 6:2, 15:2, 15:6, and 28:17).

One of the most interesting calls to convene came to Paul (chapter 2:2). Paul says, "I went up because of a revelation." That probably would have sounded to our ears a little differently thirty years ago. Today, many people go many places "by revelation." God might have spoken to Paul directly. He had before (Acts 9:4-6) and He would again (Acts 22:18). And that would have been our casual interpretation years ago. Today, however, a thought crosses a person's mind and he is apt to describe it as "revelation." And it could be, though once we would not have called it that. Perhaps that was what Paul regards here as revelation, an insinuation from God by normal, at least "daily" processes. Charismatics like to speak that way. "God told me," they will say and mean God brought the thought to mind. (Let it be noted, not every thought which comes to mind is authored by God.)

In Acts 13:2, God's will became clear through "group guidance." We are more familiar with that style, what with our history of decision through voters' assemblies, boards, committees and conventions. Nor should we dismiss lightly the group process. Many God-honoring directions have been set by the combined good judgment of our peers. It would almost seem that God has a preference for working out His will within the Christian family through the sum total wisdom of His people. For that reason alone, attempts to control the "group guidance" process to accomplish our ends and still be able to say "He says" are totally unbecoming in the church.

Paul was moved "by revelation" to go to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion, and there he consulted one-on-one with the recognized leaders of the Early Church. Paul's rising blood pressure, as he escalates his point, can be gauged by the increasingly strong terms he employs for those leaders. In chapter 2:2, they are "those who seemed influential." By verse 6, they have become "those who seemed to be something." And in verse 9 they are now those "who seemed to be pillars" in the church. That drops the veil of anonymity altogether. We're talking Peter, James and John. We're at the very top now. And the upshot of his convocation with these high-ranked apostles was Paul's

full acceptance by them as their equal, an apostle too. The "right hand of fellowship" in verse 9 was for Paul the "Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval," the credential, the badge of authority for his teaching.

Paul's strong personal defense may sound a little stuffy and sensitive. It would have been out-and-out boasting were it not for the point he is making. An attack on him and his authority is an aspersion on the Gospel which he taught, the Gospel of grace. It was that which he could not tolerate. It was in defense of that Gospel that he speaks so strongly, so boldly, even boastfully about himself and his position. To go about with our noses in the air is inappropriate for the Christian who has been well taught about humility (Luke 14:10, 22:26; James 4:10). Nevertheless, we ought not to forget who we are, the children of God (Romans 8:16-17); whose we are, namely the most glorious Spirit of God (2 Corinthians 3:18); and from whom is the Gospel which we embrace, the very angel of God (Revelation 14:6). We have a right to be confident and firm in our faith, unassailable before the barbs, the cynicism or the disregard of men.

REVIEW

OUTLINE WORKSHEET

Refer to the outline you received in Lesson 1.

In the small rectangles below the words personal section write Ch. 1 and Ch. 2. In chapter 1 Paul asserts his authority as an apostle.

In chapter 2 he speaks of his relationship with the other apostles of the Early Church.

In the larger rectangle under the words Ch. 1 which you have inserted, write "authority." This is the authority chapter.

In the rectangle under the words Ch. 2, write "apostles." This is the apostles' chapter.

In the large section under these chapter titles and above the key verse write the summary of section 1: Independent of men; dependent on Christ.

PERSONAL APPLICATION – GALATIANS 2:15-21

Dear Lord, bless the precious moments which I spend with You. Make of them the entrance by which I come before Your throne and find anew Your love and mercy. Amen.

Galatians 2:15-21

1. The Old Testament faith (verse 15).

a. According to Galatians 6:12, what was the requirement the Judaizers were insisting upon for Christians?

b. For which religion was circumcision a hallmark? (Genesis 17:9-10; Joshua 5:3; Acts 10:45)

c. What was the essence of Old Testament faith? (Jeremiah 31:31-33; Galatians 4:10; Philippians 3:4-5)

d. In verse 15, we read, "...and not Gentile sinners." Who are the people to whom Paul refers?

e. After reading verse 16, explain what the Galatians had done with reference to their original religion and why.

f. What would these people do with reference to their new religion if they were now circumcised?

2. Faith in Jesus Christ (verse 16).

a. By what is one justified? (Acts 13:39)

b. Who is the object of Christian faith? (John 20:31b)

c. One must believe who He is. Who is He? (Matthew 16:16)

d. One must believe what He has done. What has He done? (John 11:25; Ephesians 1:7).

e. Write a summary statement based on the passages above which expresses your personal faith.

3. Works (verse 16). Can works save? (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Read Romans 3:20. What purpose does the law serve?

4. Read Galatians 2:18. Square one: we pursued a religion of works (Judaism). Square two: we gave that up in favor of the Gospel of grace. Square three: back to square one? That would be like rebuilding what we destroyed.

a. What does Paul mean "rebuild what I tore down"?

b. Theologians refer at times to a "religion of merit." What does this phrase mean to you?

Would Paul approve?

c. Give examples from the way we speak to children which tend to rebuild a religion of works.

d. Give examples from your church which tend to rebuild a religion of works.

5. Do you find the following sentences consistent with Paul's point of view? If not, restate them in a manner to which you think he would approve.

a. God loves boys and girls when they are good.

b. You can't call yourself a Christian if you don't support the church.

c. The Christian Church has as many sinners as any organization.

d. On Judgment Day you'll have to answer to God for your wickedness.

6. Where did the law lead Paul? (v. 19)

7. Trace the law path in modern life. Where does it lead? Why?

8. From verse 20, what is the motivation for Christian life and living and who is the active agent?

9. Read verse 21.
- a. How does a religion of work righteousness become a frustration to us?

b. How does a religion of work righteousness become a frustration to the grace of God?

c. For what purpose did Jesus choose to die?
