

***GROWING IN GRACE***  
**“Disturbed by Grace”**  
**Galatians 2:1-10**  
**Bob Bonner**  
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This morning, outside our kitchen window, I noticed a battle going on between a paired set of Nut Hatches making their nest, and a newly arrived Sparrow who wanted the nest. The struggle was interesting for me to watch, but probably not very pleasurable for the birds. Whether you are talking about battles that take place in the animal kingdom or in the human kingdom, no one enjoys conflict. It is upsetting, disturbing and disruptive. It removes peace and tranquility from our lives. Furthermore, unresolved conflict leads to disunity amongst all those who are even remotely connected in the conflict. This is true whether the conflict takes place between members of a same team, or in marriage, or between parents and their children, or between members of an organization, like a local church.

However, as much as we would like to avoid the disturbing tension and the unsettling feelings that accompany conflict, sometimes we need for our lives to be disrupted by conflict if we want to continue to grow in true grace. Furthermore, sometimes conflict can be productive.

Charles Swindoll, in his book, *Come Before Winter*, tells of just such an incident when conflict is productive. He writes,

In the northeastern United States, codfish are not only delectable, they are a big commercial business. There's a market for eastern cod all over, especially in sections farthest removed from the northeast coastline. But the public demand posed a problem to the shippers. At first, they froze the cod, then shipped them elsewhere, but the freeze took away much of the flavor [and texture of the fish]. So, these commercial fishermen experimented with shipping their codfish alive, in tanks of seawater, but that proved even worse. Not only was it more expensive, the cod still lost its flavor, and in addition, became soft and mushy. The texture was seriously affected.

Finally, some creative soul solved the problem in a most innovative manner. The codfish were placed in the tank of water along with their natural enemy--the catfish. From the time the cod left the East coast until it arrived in its westernmost destination, those ornery catfish chased the cod all over the tank! And you guessed it, when the cod arrived at the market, they were as fresh as when they

were first caught. There was no loss of flavor nor was the texture affected. If anything, it was better than before. [p. 335]

Tension and conflict in this case proved to be very productive. And, as we will see in our text this morning, conflict can be productive and result in growth in one's family, church or team if the people fight fair and learn from the conflict. As we look at Galatians 2 this morning, we will see the first century church in conflict; conflict that in the end, produced good things for the body of Christ.

As you turn to Galatians 2, allow me to remind you of the overall context in which we find ourselves this morning. The Apostle Paul is writing this letter to a group of Jewish and Gentile Christians in a geographical district that is northwest of Israel, called Galatia. It was to Galatia that Barnabas and Paul were sent on their missionary journey. While there, he led several people to Christ and planted several churches.

Following their return from Galatia, Barnabas and Paul learned that a group called "false brethren" who were later identified as "Judaizers" came in behind them and belittled Paul and told these new Jewish and Gentile Christians in Galatia that Paul was not a true apostle and that his gospel was incomplete. These Judaizers were Jews who were disturbed by Paul's teaching that one is *saved by grace through faith alone*. These Judaizers believed and taught that one needed to trust in Jesus *and* follow the Jewish laws and traditions, including the rite of circumcision in order to be saved. In other words, they were teaching that to be saved, one had to have faith plus works to be saved.

As Victor taught us in 1:6-10, Paul declares twice that those who teach such a false doctrine should be accursed, literally "be damned to hell." I know of no other theological subject given such strong condemnation by an apostle as this. Hence, this subject of salvation by grace through faith alone had to be a pretty serious foundational Christian doctrine for Paul to make such a declaration. Later, historically, during the Reformation, people would put their lives on the line in order to protect this simple truth of the Gospel, that salvation comes by faith alone in Christ alone.

As a result of this disturbance concerning salvation by faith, Paul writes this letter to the Christians in Galatia to clear up the confusion caused by these false teachers, the Judaizers. In our passage, Paul makes his defense that he, indeed, is a true Apostle and that the Gospel he has presented to them is the only authentic Gospel.

Let's begin by reading the historical backdrop given to us in **Galatians 2:1-2**. Paul writes: **“Then after an interval of fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along also. 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.”**

When Paul speaks of the interval of fourteen years, he speaks of that time period that begins with his conversion followed by 3 years of living in Arabia. When Paul, this previous Christian-hater-turned-believer, tried to preach the Gospel after that 3 year period in Damascus and in Jerusalem, the Christians in both places refused to listen to him, because they did not trust this former persecutor of Christians. This was perfectly understandable, considering the situation. Furthermore, after having caused no small disturbance in both Damascus and Jerusalem, and making life difficult for the Christians in both cities, Paul's fellow Jewish Christians convinced Paul to leave and go back home to Tarsus. The text, in Acts 9:30, literally states that “they sent him away” and then the text adds that upon his departure, the church found “peace” in Jerusalem.

With his tail tucked between his legs, Paul went to Tarsus. Once there in Tarsus, there is no record of Paul having any sort of ministry. In fact, after having lived in Tarsus for 11 years, dear old Barnabas, according to Acts 11:25-26, went to Tarsus to find Paul to ask him to join him in ministry.

The literal words that Dr. Luke uses to record Barnabas' retrieval effort of Paul from Tarsus are very significant. First, Luke uses a word for “look” that describes Barnabas extreme efforts to turn over every rock trying to find Paul. This suggests that Paul was not having much of a ministry at this point in his life. Nobody really knew who he was or where he was. Barnabas had to look hard to find him. Then, once he found Paul, Luke uses another word to describe Barnabas' “bringing” Paul back to Antioch with him. This word describes one almost having to do so with force. In other words, defeated Paul had given up the ministry and didn't feel adequate to serve Jesus, as he speaks about in 2 Cor. 3:3-6. But with Barnabas, the “encourager's” efforts, Paul finally relented and went with Barnabas back to Antioch and eventually joined Barnabas for his first missionary journey.

When you add up all of the years that preceded the beginning of Paul's successful ministry of the gospel, you have 3 years in Arabia and 11 years in solitude in

Tarsus, making a total of 14 years before Paul began his ministry as an Apostle!! Think about this: Paul was in his 30's when he got saved. He had been schooled in the Scriptures from his youth, like few others before his salvation. But even with that, he required 14 years of preparation before God sent him out, as an apostle to the gentiles to plant churches.

I personally believe there is a lot of wisdom as well as a lesson hidden in the chronology of Paul's training before God released him into ministry. Too many young men are anxious to or are being challenged to take on a ministry when they are not yet fully ready to do so. Hence, **leadership requires maturity and character, not just knowledge. Furthermore, maturity and character take time to develop.**

I have often thought that how we, the overall church have handled the setting up of seminary graduates for ministry, let alone Bible College students being sent out to take over the pastorate of a church, is a big mistake. Rarely are men, before they are 30 and some 40 years old, ready in character and real-life experience maturity to take on the shepherding of a ministry. As I look back on more than 40 years of ministry, those who do, and succeed as a lead pastor of church are the exception rather than the rule.

In the last few years I have read a number of books written by well-known Pastors, charismatic and skilled men write about their lack of wisdom and many failures because they just were not prepared for ministry. Many of them (and their wives) state that they wished they had spent quality time under an experienced Pastor to learn about life in ministry before jumping in with both feet. I believe if you interviewed the church members of their churches you would find that they wished these young pastors had a little more experience before coming to their churches. As someone once said, "Wise is the man who knows his own strengths and limitations."

Thank God for Barnabas. He was not only a strong encourager, but a wise mentor of men. We all need a Barnabas in our lives, whether you are a woman or man. Men need a Barnabas' and women need a "Titus woman." In Seminary, the Seminary professors' wives and other local pastors' wives reached out to the young married couples to build into their wives because those young seminary wives had very little idea what they were in for! Being a pastor's wife is tough and few women are prepared for that calling.

Now, in our passage, Barnabas, Paul and Titus (a non-Jewish disciple of Paul's) go to Jerusalem to meet with the Apostles. There were two reasons for their trip to Jerusalem. The first reason is referred to in v.2, when Paul mentions "a revelation." The only recorded revelation we have in scripture that pertains to Paul and Barnabas around this time, was that of a prophet Agabus in Acts 11. The prophecy that God revealed to Agabus was about a severe famine coming shortly to Judea. So, after taking a collection of money for the Jewish Christians in Judea from the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Antioch in preparation for the famine, Barnabas, Paul and Titus headed down to Jerusalem, the capital city of Judea, to turn the money over to the other Apostles and to warn them of the coming famine.

The second reason for the trip was their need for a private meeting with "The Big Three" apostles, Peter, James and John. They needed to discuss with them the problem they were having with the Judaizers teaching a false gospel. According to v. 2, and v. 9, these three Apostles were "men of reputation" and called "pillars of the church." They were held in the highest regard by the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. If Barnabas and Paul, led by the Holy Spirit, could convince these three of their case for the Gospel, it would put to rest the arguments for the false gospel. Part of their discussion involved the controversial rite of circumcision of non-Jews. Hence, this is why Titus, an uncircumcised non-Jew was brought to the meeting. Barnabas and Paul wanted the other apostles to hear Titus' testimony and that he indeed was a new person in Christ. We will read more about that in the verses to follow. If you are interested in learning more about details of this meeting, you will find it in Acts 11:27-30.

As we consider this passage, keep in mind that this is Paul's first return to Jerusalem in 11 years. Although Paul had already met briefly with Peter and James in Jerusalem, for 15 days 11 years ago, that previous meeting had been simply on a friendly matter. It had nothing to do with church business or the discussion of the gospel. In contrast, this present visit to Jerusalem that Paul is writing about had to do with church business. And as we will soon read in v. 9, this visit is limited to the three apostolic "pillars of the church" Peter, James and John. These three, as v.2 tells us were men who were of "reputation." In other words, all the Jewish believers accepted whatever they had to say as being authoritatively from God.

In our next three verses, Paul presents a problem that he and Barnabas faced in Antioch with the Judaizers and the potential problem they were causing in Galatia among the newly planted churches. Some Judaizers from Jerusalem came to Antioch and said that Titus wasn't a true follower of Jesus because he had to

become a Jew first through the traditional rite of circumcision. They demanded that Paul and Barnabas circumcise Titus. Paul and Barnabas refused to do so, because it would have said that faith in Christ alone was not sufficient for someone to be saved. It would have declared that *faith plus some human effort* was necessary to be saved.

Hence, we read in v. 3-5, the results of Barnabas' and Paul's defense of Titus' lack of circumcision before these three pillars of the faith, Peter, James and John. We read in **"But not even Titus who was with me, though he was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised."** First, Paul tells us right off the bat that, The "Big three" *affirmed Titus' salvation*, without his being compelled to follow after the Jewish traditional rite of circumcision. The Apostles accepted the fruit of Paul's ministry and that there was no need for anything other than faith in Christ for one to be fully forgiven, approved of and accepted by God. There were no additional works necessary to be saved and nothing could take away or lessen Titus' salvation. It is Christ's finished work on the cross that saves and keeps us, not any of our efforts.

Paul continues, v.4, **"But it was because of the false brethren [the Judaizers who had demanded Titus to be circumcised] who had sneaked in [to the church at Antioch] to spy out our liberty [a reference of being free from having to practice the Jewish Law and traditions in order to be saved] which we have in Christ Jesus, in order to bring us into bondage [a reference to being tied down to Jewish laws and traditions]. But we did not yield in subjection to them for even an hour, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you."**

So, why is Paul writing this in his letter to the Galatians? The Judaizers have made their way into the churches in Galatia spreading their false gospel and they needed to be corrected and stopped from the highest Jewish authorities of the time, Peter, James and John. It was for the future of gentile believers like Titus and those in Galatia, people whom Paul would never meet, that he went to Jerusalem to settle this issue about the foundation of the gospel, once and for all. However, as we will see next time, it was going to take more than just one meeting to settle this issue, and even then, history proves, the Judaizers would be difficult to stop.

In v. 6-10, we read of more results from Barnabas', Paul's and Titus' meeting with the "Big Three." Paul says, **"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."** These words of

Paul were not meant to be a put down or disparaging of these three other Apostles. Paul is simply saying that these three authoritative apostles did nothing to correct the message of the Gospel that he had already been preaching. But rather, Paul adds, **“But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised [another word for Gentiles], just as Peter had been [entrusted with the gospel] to the circumcised [the Jews] (for He [meaning the Spirit of God] who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), 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.”**

The “right hand of fellowship” was a Near Eastern custom. When you clasped the right hand of a person, you were making a solemn vow of friendship, which would be a mark of their future fellowship and partnership in the ministry of Jesus Christ. Paul could not have asked for more. The “Big Three” had just *affirmed Paul’s calling* as a bonifide apostle just as themselves, *and* the correctness of his *message*, that is, his preaching of the correct gospel. And to make sure that there were no doubts in his Galatian readers’ minds, Paul states again that these “pillars” had said that he was Christ’s ambassador to the gentiles, *NOT* those Judaizers who had infiltrated both Antioch and the churches of Galatia.

In **v. 10**, Paul closes with this one request that the “Big Three,” Peter, James and John made of Paul and Barnabas before they left for home, in Antioch. We read, **“They only asked us to remember the poor-- the very thing I also was eager to do.”** The very reason Paul and Barnabas had already come to Jerusalem was to deliver money for a relief fund for many of the poor who would soon be hit by a famine. He had already shown that he was “eager” to care for the “poor” and less fortunate who were in times of trouble and need. This request was easily accepted. From that point on in Paul’s other missionary journeys, he remembered this commitment and every time he returned to Jerusalem, he brought back money from the predominantly gentile churches to care for their Jewish Christian believers in Judea who were suffering due to the famine.

### **Applications**

That by the way, is a real sign of spiritual maturity and that Paul and Barnabas had both their financial and ministerial priorities straight. **One evidence of true salvation is when a Christian *intentionally* makes it part of one’s *financial giving plan* to meet the needs of “*the least of these.*”** When a Christian who says he or she is genuinely concerned for local and distant Christians who are in

need and proves it by backing it up with their wallets, then you know you have a person who has their spiritual and financial priorities straight. The apostle **James** instructs us, when he writes, **“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”**

### **Principles that help resolve conflict:**

This morning, I introduced our study with what a challenge and how unsettling and disturbing conflict can be. I also mentioned that it can prove to be productive. In our passage, we saw a conflict worth resolving, a conflict over the gospel of grace, versus the gospel of laws and tradition. A conflict over what is the true gospel. By the end of our passage, that conflict was resolved. Many conflicts we find ourselves in won't get resolved to our liking. But, what can we take away from this study of Scripture that can help us be more successful in resolving conflict? I'd like to point to three principles exemplified in our passage that can help make conflict productive.

*First*, what is it that usually causes conflict to escalate rather than find solutions? One thing is pride, thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think, or we think less of others than we should think, and we demonstrate that pride when we refuse to listen or take seriously what others may be thinking. We fail to put ourselves in their shoes.

Barnabas and Paul did not go into the forum with Peter, James and John, puffed up and making demands, or calling the three apostles “lousy leaders” because they didn't foresee the problems with gentiles coming to Christ. He didn't blame them for not having taken the Judaizers aside and setting them straight 14 years ago. As a result, they were able to show them the value and respect men in their position deserved.

They remembered that ***Christ values other fellow believers no less or more than you. Therefore, we treat other believers as persons Jesus values and died for.***

Presently, I'm dealing with a leader in another organization concerning a disruption he has caused by his manner of making decisions as well as the decisions themselves. One of the things I am trying to keep in mind is that because of his position, I must treat him as one valued by Christ, whether saved or not. As I do, my tendency to become arrogantly angry is kept in check. My hope

is that he might learn something helpful as a leader that will make him even more successful in the future. But if I don't keep my pride in check, I will not succeed.

*Second*, Barnabas and Paul were successful because they did not want to embarrass the Apostles by bringing to them a problem the apostles had never encountered and put them on the spot in a large public forum, without the opportunity to think through and question even their own thoughts about the issue. To do so would put undue pressure on these guys. So, what did they do? They talked to them privately and honestly. They honored the apostles. They went privately to them so that in their discussions, if they raised issues that the apostles had never thought of before, Paul and Barnabas would not cause them to lose face. They cared about them and their reputations. Hence, **when you have something on your mind and it concerns a leader(s), meet with them privately.**

When you sense a potential conflict, do your best to discuss it privately or in as small a forum as possible. When you have an issue with your child or spouse, don't handle it before the whole family, unless the issue has already been made public to the rest of the family. Even then, be careful as to how much is talked about before the rest of the family. Respect them or value them as Jesus does and go off by yourselves to discuss and settle the issue. Do whatever is possible to help the person save face.

*Third*, when the leader has been confronted with an error, that leader **needs to be given the opportunity to repent.** And by repent, I mean to rethink his actions, decisions, theology such that he can change his position or do what is necessary to make things right. Give them the freedom to say, "You know what, I have never handled something like that before, or I have never thought of it that way before, let us pray about it and I'll get back to you." Give the person(s) some wobble room to work it out. There is no need to humiliate him.

I'm thinking specifically of a brother in this fellowship who probably doesn't know in what high esteem I hold him. Furthermore, he rightfully probably doesn't really care. Yet, he has taught me on several occasions what true humility and maturity is about in his own quiet way over these past 30 years. Along time ago he came to our Elder Board to share a personal conviction, one in which he had differed with something I had taught on one Sunday morning. He knew what he believed was right for him but wasn't really sure if what I had said was accurate or legitimate. In other words, how could he be right, and I be right?

So, with his Bible, he came to the Elders to point us to some verses that he understood to teach that what he believed was the only way one could look at the situation. Without rancor or name calling or anger, he just laid it on the table without any sense that if we disagreed with him that he would feel rejected or that he would reject us. Furthermore, he came ready to learn, if need be, and to be of help.

When he finished his presentation, different elders commended him on his use of scripture. Some of his points caused me to stop momentarily to reconsider what I had taught. As I was thinking about what he had showed us, some other elders proceeded to point him to some other scriptures that revealed that this subject was not as black and white an issue as he had presumed. There was, in fact, a legitimate reason for me to say what I had. Some of the men on our board held the same conviction as my brother, but were able to instruct him, that they could not, on the basis of scripture, demand that the rest of us agree with their or his conviction.

When this brother realized that, he did not change his conviction, but I felt that when he left, he knew that we had heard him and valued him. His whole demeanor was that of love, support, respect and wanting mostly to honor Jesus with his concern. What could have turned into a major conflict, which in some churches the issue had become a big problem, instead turned into an opportunity for all involved to love and respect one another enough to agree to disagree and move forward together.

Philip Melanchthon, Martin Luther's chief associate in leading the Protestant Reformation was a brilliant yet calm theologian. In a day of major far reaching battles concerning theology and Christian lifestyle, this scholarly gentleman, Melanchthon summed it up in a superb axiom or principle as to when to be dogmatic and when to be willing to agree to disagree on theological or church matters. He said, "In essentials, unity; in nonessentials, liberty; in all things, charity."

Whether you are struggling over issues that deal with the essentials of the gospel message or the nonessentials of Biblical theology which are often not clear, when you debate or confront others, remember to treat others with the love and respect with which Jesus treated them as He hung on the cross for all of our sin.

As to the issue that Barnabas, Paul and Titus brought to the church leadership, the issue of the Gospel was an essential. They had to hold true to the doctrine that

salvation comes by grace and through faith alone in the finished work of Christ on the cross. There is nothing we can do to add to Christ's finished work or take away from his finished work on the cross. I am forever grateful for Barnabas and Paul's example of resolving conflict humbly and lovingly without compromising the truth.

Is there someone right now, with whom you are in conflict? If so, I ask you to consider what has been said this morning. Have you treated that person as one for whom Jesus Christ values so much that He died for that person? Have you been teachable? Have you done what you could to calm the conflict or agitate it? If you have not treated that person as one whom Christ loves... If you have agitated the problem... If you were not teachable... If you became defensive because you thought they rejected you because they rejected your ideas... What do you think Jesus would have you do? Would He have you, in His power and love, go back to that person and admit that you were wrong and try once more to work it out? If so, then obey His still small voice. If you want to obey, but you are not sure how you should go about correcting what you have already done, then talk to one of the elders. And if you are an elder, talk to the rest of us. We have Jesus and each other to work with in this church family, and God expects that we will love one another well through the school of conflict.