

PRESERVING THE TRUTH OF THE GOSPEL

Galatians 2:1-10

Introduction:

It was not long after Paul had established the churches in these cities and towns in the region of Galatia that other teachers had come in bringing with them a message or gospel that was different from what Paul had given them. It was a different gospel which, Paul says, is not really the gospel at all. A couple of weeks ago we looked at the claim that Paul made that there is no other gospel. There is only one gospel, the marvelous message of grace through Jesus Christ. Anything else is not really a gospel at all.

We call these false teachers Judaizers because they insisted that Gentiles be circumcised (6:12; 5:2) and keep the Jewish feasts (4:10) if they wanted to be justified and reach completion as Christians (3:3). The Judaizers believed and taught that Paul's gospel of justification by grace alone through faith alone was inadequate. So they added their other requirements. But in order to effectively counter Paul's teaching they needed to discredit him and his authority as an apostle. Their claim seemed to be that Paul had no authority because he had simply gotten his gospel from the other apostles. He was, as Piper puts it, a "second-hander." He got his message second-hand from the Jerusalem apostles and had adapted it in illegitimate ways. His authority was not binding because it only came from man not God.

Well we looked last week at Paul's claim that his gospel had come directly from Jesus Christ. Read Galatians 1:11-12. Here he asserts that he did not receive his *gospel* message from man, nor was he taught it, but it came through a revelation of Jesus Christ. The whole point of Galatians 1:11-24 is to argue that Paul was not a "second-hander." He points to his past life and the change that came about at his conversion as evidence that he had personally met Jesus Christ. He also points to the timeline of his life to show that he could not have received his message from the other apostles, because he had not spent time with them for several years following his conversion.

He makes a very persuasive case that his apostleship and his gospel came to him independently from the Jerusalem apostles, and that he stands on an equal footing before Christ and has equal authority with Peter, James, and John.

The Truth of a Unified Gospel

Now we come to chapter 2 and here Paul addresses another issue. If the gospel Paul preached did not come from man or through man, nor was he taught it by the other apostles, then maybe it is just something he thought up himself. Perhaps it is just a fabrication out of his own mind. It would almost appear from the whole context of this passage that this is another accusation being made against Paul by these false teachers who are trying to impose their Judaic practices on the new believers in Galatia. It seems they are saying, "But Paul's message is not consistent with the Jerusalem apostles. He is teaching something different from James and Peter and John."

This raises a very serious question. Is there a contradiction among the apostles themselves? Do we have men of equal authority preaching two different gospels? The Judaizers **claimed** to represent the apostles in Jerusalem, but their message did not square with Paul's. So even when the question of Paul's authority is settled, another serious and threatening question looms up: Is there disunity among the apostles?

Ephesians 2:19-20 speak of Gentile believers as being "...fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone."

So, if one apostle preaches one gospel and another apostle preaches another gospel, the foundation of the church is cracked, and the whole structure will eventually collapse.

So let's have a look at Paul's defense.

The Trip to Jerusalem

Read vv. 1-3. There are a few things we need to observe from these verses. This list is not original with me, but I believe these are important thoughts that we need to be aware of from these verses.

First, Paul did not go to Jerusalem because he was having second thoughts about his gospel and wanted to compare his message to the other apostles in order to make sure he had it right. He says: "I went up *because of a revelation*." God himself was directing the steps of his apostle by revelation.

Second, there is the question of why Paul took Titus? Well, Titus was really a test case as he confronts the issue of unity within the apostolic message. Titus was a Greek, and he was not circumcised according to Old Testament laws. Yet he is a brother in Christ *by faith*. This is the freedom Paul stands for. And Titus is his best case. Would he be forced to be circumcised by the apostles in Jerusalem or not? There was no better way of forcing the real issue than to take along a real person.

Third observation: He met for a private meeting with "...those who seemed influential..." This is clearly a reference to the apostles, especially Peter, James (the Lord's brother), and John. A private meeting was necessary in order to carefully compare the message they were proclaiming before confronting the false "brothers" who appear in vv. 4-5.

Fourth, Paul's purpose in going up to Jerusalem, according to verse 2, was to confirm that he had not run in vain. Paul's ministry would have been in vain if the Judaizers were right; that is, if the apostles in Jerusalem disagreed with Paul and insisted on circumcision for Gentile believers. This would mean that the apostles of Christ had contradictory messages, and no church could be established on such a fractured foundation. Paul did not need to confirm his own gospel; he needed to confirm that the other apostles agreed, and that there was unity.

Confronting False Brothers

In these next verses Paul describes for us his encounter with the false teachers in Jerusalem. We need to start with v. 3 to get the context - read vv. 3-5.

It seems that Paul wanted his readers in the churches of Galatia to understand that there were those from Jerusalem who claimed to be brothers in Christ, and claimed to represent the apostles in Jerusalem, but they were "false brothers." They were not teaching the true gospel of grace, but were teaching a gospel of works based on the Law.

v. 4 – these false brothers wanted to bring people into slavery to the Law. They did not appreciate the freedom in Christ that Paul was proclaiming.

v. 5 – Paul had no patience with these false brothers. He says, "...to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment." His reason was "...so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you." That is a powerful statement. Paul knew that if he gave in to the teaching of these false brothers in any way, the whole truth of the gospel would be destroyed. There would be no gospel, no good news, if Paul gave in to the demand for circumcision. The good news to the world is that right standing before God was totally paid for by the death of Christ at Calvary and can be enjoyed only through faith in him. Any requirement that causes us to rely on our work and not Christ's work is the end of the gospel.

Paul has made very clear here in these verses who these trouble-makers really are—false brothers from Jerusalem—and what is really at stake here—the truth of the gospel.

Unity Among the Apostles

In vv. 6-10 Paul tells of his meeting with the apostles in Jerusalem. Read vv. 6-10. The most essential statement Paul makes regarding this meeting is found in v. 6 – "...those...who seemed influential added nothing to me."

When Paul speaks of those who seemed influential or important, he is probably speaking of Peter, John, and James (the brother of Jesus, who had become the leader of the church in Jerusalem.) Paul says they had nothing to add to my message. Remember what he said in 1:12 regarding his gospel – it did not come from man, nor was he taught it by others. Now after fourteen years, with virtually no contact with the apostles, he comes to Jerusalem to meet with the leaders of the church, men who had lived and walked with Jesus and were taught by Jesus. When they "compare notes" they find that his gospel is complete and accurate. There is no discrepancy between what they are teaching and what he is teaching. There is complete unity of the apostolic message.

vv. 7-9 – acceptance, blessing and commission by the apostles.

There was the unity that Paul had come to Jerusalem looking for. His message was the same as the apostles in Jerusalem. Clearly these so-called brothers who came from Jerusalem with a gospel of works based on law and circumcision did not represent the Jerusalem apostles. The apostolic witness, the foundation of the church, was *not* split. It was firm and solid. There was a strong, united base for two great missions, one to the Jews and one to the Gentiles. That was a great day for missions, a great day for *us* Gentiles. Paul stood his ground "that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for *us*."

Conclusion

So again I come to the question of how this affects us. What difference does all of this make to you and me? Well, I want to suggest a few things that I believe are important for us.

1. It helps to establish in our minds the absolute authority that the apostles had. If our faith isn't based on authority, then our faith has no foundation.
2. This passage assures us of the unity of the NT Scriptures. The NT is not a hodgepodge of the theology of Paul and the theology of Peter and the theology of John. It is the theology of God represented by all these men. There is a beautiful unity in Scripture.
3. Doctrinal unity must be important to us, especially on points that are crucial. *It ought to bother us that there is so much division in the church over matters of important doctrine.* We live in a society in our country which places great value on the richness of traditions, and diversity of values and beliefs. That is fine when speaking about cultural and ethnic diversity. But when it comes to doctrine within the church there is no room for disunity on the core fundamentals of our faith.
4. And finally, tied in with the importance of doctrinal unity, the gospel of grace must be defended and fought for. It is the only true gospel. Any other gospel is no gospel at all.

We have Paul's defense of the unity of the gospel message, a foundation that stands firm and solid, bearing witness to the truth of the gospel message that Jesus Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose on the third day to save forever those who trust him.