

Free: The Message of Galatians Then & Now

Lesson Three – Live Free!

Galatians 2:1-21

As we move into Galatians 2, Paul continues defending the gospel of grace as well as his apostleship. From the text we can see that not only was the gospel of salvation by grace alone under attack, but Paul himself was the victim of character assassination. One subtle but sure way to undermine the message is to discredit the messenger. Branded as a renegade by his detractors, Paul defends his apostolic authority by presenting two authenticating interactions: his endorsement by the Jerusalem leaders and his correction of Peter's legalism.

I. Forever Friends (Galatians 2:1)

As I study the life of Paul, I marvel at what he was required to endure for the sake of the gospel (see 2 Corinthians 11:23-28). So, my heart rejoices every time I read that God gave Paul co-laborers in the work of the ministry. The value of Christian friends cannot be overstated.

Throughout my Christian journey, I have come to appreciate and value my Christian friends. I count these friendships to be among some of my most prized possessions. Becoming a Christian places us not only in the body of Christ, but in the family of God, building enduring relationships and making for sweet fellowship in the Lord.

When Craig and I gave our hearts to the Lord in 1978, our group of running buddies abandoned us overnight. They did not want any part of our newfound relationship with Jesus Christ, nor were they interested in our newly acquired interest in the things of God. Although it actually was in our best interest as new believers to distance ourselves from our former friends and their lifestyle, it was a painfully lonesome time for me personally. I love people and enjoy the camaraderie of friends. However, this lonely season in my life was short-lived. As we began to regularly attend church and joined a Sunday school class, we were blessed to meet many like-minded people who shared our zeal and passion for the Lord. The depth of communion we discovered with these precious believers quickly dwarfed the shallow relationships we had previously known. Friendships forged in the Lord are forever friends!

Throughout Paul's ministry, he had faithful friends in the Lord. In Galatians 2:1, Paul mentions Barnabas and Titus, dear men of God who came alongside him in the work of the ministry. In fact, it was Barnabas who was one of the first to acknowledge Paul's genuine conversion and befriend him, taking him to meet the skeptical disciples (see Acts 9:27). Paul's previous reputation for violently persecuting the church created fear among the disciples who assumed his testimony was a carefully contrived trick in order to identify Christians and imprison them. When Barnabas heard Paul preach the grace of the Lord Jesus and boldly proclaim the good news in Damascus, he was thoroughly convinced of the authenticity of Paul's testimony. He took him to meet the disciples, giving Paul a ringing endorsement.

Barnabas' name means "son of encouragement," an appropriate moniker for this gifted and gracious exhorter. Paul was often on the receiving end of Barnabas' kind words of encouragement and the two became dear friends, traveling and ministering together in the name of the Lord.

Titus, a Greek, was one of Paul's most trusted and dependable co-laborers in the Kingdom work. Paul referred to him as "my true child in a common faith" (Titus 1:4). Quite possibly, Paul led Titus to the saving knowledge of Christ. Titus proved himself to be a faithful friend and confidante to Paul, as well as a strong and gifted leader in the church under the apostle's tutelage.

Proverbs 18:24 says, "There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother." Beloved, be careful to cultivate godly friendships that will urge you along in your walk of faith, hold you accountable to pursue godliness, and help you avoid negative influences. As we move along our earthly pilgrimage, strong Christian friendships can multiply the joy in the journey and ease the inevitable seasons of sorrow. Of course, Jesus is the ultimate friend, but He has graced our lives with godly friendships that are priceless gifts. Treasure them!

II. Proof Positive (Galatians 2:2-10)

God divinely reveals to Paul His desire for the apostle and his companions to travel to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles and church leaders there. The purpose of this meeting is to clarify the Apostle Paul's position on the Christian's relationship to the Law. Paul submits to them the message he had been charged with to take to the Gentiles. Paul was not there to have his ministry scrutinized. He had gotten his message straight from the resurrected Lord and it was certainly not up for debate. Paul knows in Whom he has believed. He recognizes his calling was "not through the agency of man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead" (Galatians 1:1). Furthermore, he considers himself a "bondservant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10). He is not "seeking the favor of men" (Galatians 1:10) or striving to please them. God sends Paul to Jerusalem to help bring unity in the mission of the church.

Division is one of the hallmarks in every aspect of our culture and has, in some cases, infiltrated the church. There are those who have honed their skills on the fine art of creating divisiveness. Harmony within the body of Christ is one of the defining features of our faith. While we may not agree on every non-essential, we are to be united on the tenants of the faith: the Book, the Blood, and the Blessed Hope. God's Word is infallible and inerrant. Salvation is in Christ alone through His substitutionary death and sinless blood. And Jesus is coming back again! Paul understands the essential need for doctrinal accuracy combined with the desperate need for unity within the body of Christ.

Paul and Barnabas take Titus, a Gentile convert, along with them to Jerusalem as an example of God's grace extended to whoever was willing to repent of their sins and receive Christ by faith. Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile saved by faith without any works of righteousness or religious rituals. This young Gentile convert was a product of the very ministry the Judaizers

were attacking. The men met privately with the apostles and church leaders, including Peter, John, and James. The apostles' response to Titus' conversion would reveal their conviction on salvation by grace through faith apart from any good works. Titus' conversion experience was validated and he was not "compelled to be circumcised" (Galatians 2:3).

Circumcision for the Jews was a very serious issue. It was an established custom that dated back to the days of Abraham and the birth of the Jewish nation. It was a symbolic act and a covenant sign that expressed obedience to God and set His people apart from the heathen nations. It indicated cutting away the old life of sin and dedicating oneself to God. More than any other practice, circumcision separated God's people from every other tribe and nation, and signified their individual and national allegiance to the one true God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In time, the significance of circumcision lost its meaning and just became part of a ritual with little significance.

The incredible gift of salvation is offered to us on the basis of grace. If you take grace out of the equation and attempt to substitute works, it is no longer grace! It becomes a religion of good works. In Romans 11:6 Paul writes, "But if it is by grace it is no longer on the basis of works, otherwise grace is no longer grace."

The Judaizers wanted to make Christians **slaves** by requiring them to observe the Old Testament laws 'rules and ceremonies, especially circumcision. Paul stood absolutely firm because **the truth of the gospel** was at stake. To impose circumcision on Titus would be to deny that salvation was by faith alone and to affirm the law as the means to God's acceptance (Anders, M., *Galatians-Colossians*, p. 21).

James, Peter, and John recognize that God has called Paul to take the gospel to the Gentiles just as He had commissioned Peter to take the gospel to the Jews. The Jerusalem leaders extend "the right hand of fellowship" (Galatians 2:9), evidence they endorse the gospel Paul is preaching and affirm his apostleship.

III. Courageous Confrontation (Galatians 2:11-21)

After relating the details of the Jerusalem Council, Paul recounts another event when his apostolic authority was confirmed. In Antioch, a Gentile city familiar to the Galatians, Paul was called upon by the Lord to correct Peter. For those of us who genuinely love the Lord, but occasionally (or way more than we wished was true) find a gap between our beliefs and our behavior, this account should give us some hope and encouragement.

Peter had arrived in Antioch and had been warmly welcomed by the church. Peter shared teaching responsibilities, enjoyed sweet fellowship, and ate together with Gentile converts as they enjoyed their common bond in the Lord. However, when a delegation arrived from Jerusalem, Peter immediately began to hold himself aloof from the Gentile believers. Sadly, even Barnabas was contaminated by Peter's hypocrisy and followed suit, withdrawing from communion with the Gentile Christians. In fact, Peter and Barnabas began to treat the Gentile

Christians just as the Judaizers had, insisting that fellowship with them must be withheld until they embraced Jewish practices.

It should not be overlooked that even after Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and had walked with God for many years, he was still prone to stumble and fall. This is *a kiss from the King* to me personally. It urges me on in my own faith walk to read that Peter, who loved God and was willing to serve Him at all costs, could falter. Not only does it encourage me that Peter stumbled after years of knowing the Lord, but I am ecstatic to read that it was not the end of a fruitful ministry. I do not want to sound soft on sin, but I am grateful that we serve a God of second chances. Failure is not final in the Lord! After Paul confronted him, Peter made the necessary corrections and God continued to use Him. Now that is GOOD NEWS!

In his confrontation with Peter, Paul uses, for the first time, the word *justified* to describe our standing in Christ. The word means to be made right with God. Paul writes that we are "justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Law no flesh can be justified" (Galatians 2:16). Paul went on to write, "For through the Law I died to the Law, so that I might live to God" (Galatians 2:19). The Law was given to be God's tutor to reveal man's hopeless condition and his desperate need for a Savior. When Paul came to realize that the Law could reveal sin, but could not redeem the sinner, he embraced the completed work of Jesus Christ.

At the moment of conversion, we are identified with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection. Therefore, we have been crucified with Christ. The old man died and a new creation in Christ was raised in his place. We have been set free to live in the power of His resurrection. Unfortunately, we still live in these earthly vessels of clay that are prone to sin as long as we are earthbound. We often revert back to the sinful habit patterns of our lives prior to our conversion. We must daily crucify the sinful desires that attempt to enslave us and keep us from the victorious life of Christ. Dying to self and considering ourselves alive to Christ is a slow and often painful process. But by yielding to the promptings of His indwelling Holy Spirit and obeying the written revelation of His Word, we will be able to make forward process in our walk of faith as we grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.

In Christ Jesus we are free from all external ceremonies, religious activity, rituals, and rites. We are free from *the penalty of sin*. We are free from *the power of sin*. And one day we will be free from *the presence of sin* when we see our Savior face-to-face. Why would anyone want to exchange their freedom in Christ for the yoke of slavery? Beloved, we are FREE!