

“To Preserve the Truth”

Galatians 2:1-5

Introduction:

1. Review: Paul is providing evidence that the gospel (good news) came from God. It was not a human idea in any way. Specifically, he received the gospel directly from God, and not from anyone in the Jerusalem church. He was completely independent of their authority. The gospel creates the church; the church did not create the gospel.

2. In this section (2:1-10), Paul next tells of his second visit to Jerusalem that is recorded in Acts 11:27-30; 12:25. A brief review of the circumstances leading up to his second visit will be helpful. As Paul wrote in chapter one of Galatians, he formerly persecuted the church, being a driving force in the persecution connected with Stephen’s death, when the church in Jerusalem was scattered. During that scattering, some went to Antioch, and a new assembly of learners of Christ started there. The church at Antioch soon became a mixed gathering of Jew and Gentile believers and grew rapidly. The term “Christian” was first applied to believers in Antioch. Barnabas arrives in Antioch and quickly realizes that he needs help in the growing congregation. So, Barnabas finds Paul in Tarsus, and Paul becomes one of the leaders of the church in Antioch. It was during that time that the events in this section occurred (about the year 43/44). This was before Paul and Barnabas went on their first missionary journey recorded in Acts 13-14. Paul writes Galatians about 48/49, which is a year or so before the conference in Jerusalem recorded in Acts chapter fifteen.

Exposition:

I. A visit ordered by the Lord (2:1-2) – Though we might not be able to discern the Lord’s operations as clearly as Paul, who was guided by the Holy Spirit, it is good to know that Christ Jesus still is at work in our lives. What seems to have one purpose at the present may prove to have other, far-reaching consequences.

A. Some circumstances of this visit

1. It occurred fourteen years after his conversion, and so about eleven years after his first visit. This is an important part of the case Paul builds for his independent ministry. A considerable time had passed without contact from other apostles. Paul could not in any way be answerable to them.

Illustration: If our church was part of a denomination, I can assure you that they would not allow eleven years to pass without contacting us. They would be eager for our money, if not our fellowship.

2. He had two main companions with him.

a. Barnabas, as already said, was his chief coworker at the time. The church at Antioch had taken a collection to help those suffering in the church in Jerusalem and entrusted its delivery to two of their pastors.

b. Titus had been converted under Paul's ministry (Ti 1:4). He was a Greek, and he became a highly valued coworker.

3. He went "in response to a revelation". Paul is saying that the visit to Jerusalem wasn't his idea. It was the Lord's idea. Paul was a recipient of great revelations from the Lord (cf. 2 Cor 12:7). As the apostles set the pattern for gospel ministry, it was crucial that they have direct guidance from the Lord at certain points. Again, the point is that he was not "called on the carpet" by the apostles in Jerusalem. No, the Lord told him to go there.

Apply: Some Christians have a great longing to receive similar direct revelations from the Lord. Now that is certainly an interesting desire, but as a pastor I would advise you to have a far deeper longing to know the Scriptures. If you are not obeying what the Lord says in his written word, I think your professed desire for direct revelation is defective and misleading to say the least. In other words, let's open Colossians three or Romans twelve or some other such passage and discuss how you are following the written revelation God has already given you.

B. A brief account of the second visit

1. Paul and the rest followed a wise course of action. They held a private discussion. If some disagreement had arisen, it could be more easily handled as the leaders of the two churches talked privately. The apostles were concerned with the purity of the gospel message, which is one reason they had sent Barnabas to Antioch some years before. There is much to be said for private talks where people can ask questions and present their opinions. It helps everyone to come to a better understanding of the issues.

Comment: I say this to promote godly discussion and not to shut it down. I have been part of both public and private discussion over many years in the ministry, and in my opinion the private discussions were much more beneficial. If you talk a lot in private, what you say in public is generally less emotional, better informed and wiser.

2. The matter discussed was the gospel that Paul preaches among the nations. Note his use of the present tense. Not for a moment does he allow for any change from the gospel that God revealed to him (cf. 1:6-9). Paul was not seeking the approval of the leaders

of the Jerusalem church. He did not need that. But he wanted to insure that there was agreement between the Jewish and Gentile parts of the church, or the unity that the gospel message was creating in Antioch and surrounding areas could be fractured, and so everything that Paul was presenting accomplishing would then come to nothing.

Apply: Unity among believers in gospel communities is crucial (Jn 17:23; Eph 4:3-6).

II. A test case in retrospect (2:3)

A. A surprising providence

1. It is highly doubtful that Paul, Barnabas, or the rest of the church in Antioch intended to make Titus a test case. As far as we know, circumcision was a non-issue at the time of this second visit. The error of requiring circumcision for salvation arose after the first missionary journey of Barnabas and Paul.

2. However, as Paul looks back on the visit, he can see the hand of God in what happened.

Illustration: In my first class in Grand Rapids, I “happened” to sit to a man named Tarry, through whom I later got a factory job that I very much needed.

B. The acceptance of Titus as a Christian

1. Although Titus was a Greek, and so uncircumcised, the apostles did not compel him to be circumcised before they would accept him as a fellow believer in the Lord. No such action occurred! This is a decisive argument. The other apostles saw nothing lacking in Titus for salvation and fellowship in the church. Participation in the rituals of the law covenant was unnecessary. All that was necessary was true faith in the Lord Jesus.

2. We must accept one another on gospel grounds. God accepts all on the same terms: by grace through faith in Christ Jesus alone. Therefore, the church must accept all who repent and believe the gospel (cf. Rm 15:7).

Apply: Every church must strive to reach everyone who God brings to them. We ought to see variety in the social, educational, economic, and ethnic backgrounds of people. We should welcome all age levels with their various interests.

III. Two conflicting agendas (2:4-5) – Now Paul tells how the issue of circumcision and salvation arose in the church. The first doctrinal conflict in the church was about the relationship between the old and the new covenants. Circumcision, which was required by the old or law covenant for membership in the people of God, became the presentation problem. But the real issue, as Paul makes plain in the rest of the letter, was much deeper.

A. The agenda of the gospel twisters

1. Their presence in the church was not on account of agreement with the gospel, but they infiltrated as spies. They were not there to worship the Lord and to fellowship with his people. "They were acting like intelligence-agents building up a case against slackness over Jewish ritual requirements" (Guthrie).

Illustration: During our college days, we knew people like this. And their breed is by no means extinct. You can encounter them among legalistic fundamentalists and law-centered reformed groups.

2. They wanted to rob true Christians of the freedom we possess in Christ in order to make us slaves. To put someone under the law robs him or her of the liberty we have living under the supervision of the Holy Spirit as adult sons of God. It makes a Christian live like little children, bound by all the restrictions of rituals. The same is true today. Modern legalists talk about being zealous for "separation from worldliness" or about being zealous for "God's law", but their true agenda is to be lords over other Christians with rules and regulations.

3. Paul states that the ones who held these twisted views were not Jerusalem apostles. They agreed with Paul about the gospel! Those who held twisted views were "false brothers".

B. The agenda of Paul

1. He desired to maintain a consistent testimony. At no time did he give in to them. He need he had to stand firm to protect others. A slipup could lead others into bondage.

2. He desired to maintain the truth of the gospel. He knew he had to contend vigorously for the gospel and the freedom it brings. So then, the issue is life in Christ with the glory of overflowing joy and freedom versus life in bondage to the law covenant with its rules and rituals. The Lord Jesus Christ came to earth, lived among us, died and rose again, so that we might be right with God. The good news is that his saving work reaches back to all our past sins, and reaches forward for eternal life and joy. Christ freely offers forgiveness of all sins, righteousness that makes us acceptable to God, and future glory to all who turn from their sins and trust in him as Lord and Savior. Right where you sit, you may ask the Lord Jesus for salvation.

Conclusion:

1. How does your inner person respond to this? Do you rejoice in the gospel that sets people free? Or are you disturbed by matters like music, worship styles, and rituals? Does everyone have to worship your way? Or can you accept others who are different from you?

2. Paul was deeply concerned about the freedom that the gospel brings. But what is your concern? Who are you seeking to set free by the gospel? Take the handout and write down five people that you will try to set free by the end of January 2010.

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