

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON NINETEEN)

“CONTENDING FOR THE GOSPEL” (PART 5)

GALATIANS 2:6-10

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

6 But from those who were influential (whatever they were makes no difference to me; God shows no favoritism between people)—those influential leaders added nothing to my message.

7 On the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised

8 (for he who empowered Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles)

9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who had a reputation as pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

10 They requested only that we remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do.

In our previous Lesson we stated that in the first ten verses of **Galatians** chapter **2**, Paul informs his readers about a visit that he made to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion. In all probability, this visit

was made at the time of the **Jerusalem Council which was convened in A.D. 49 or 50.**

Paul's first concern when he went to Jerusalem, was to secure a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders of the Jerusalem church, with a view to outlining the Gospel which he, Barnabas and others had been preaching to the Gentiles. Paul was in no doubt whatsoever about the authenticity of either his ministry or his message. What he was concerned about was the future of the Gospel among the Gentiles, because this was the specific ministry that he had received from Christ. Paul did not need to confirm the Gospel that he was preaching; he needed to confirm that the Apostles in Jerusalem were preaching the same Gospel. He wanted to get their approval in respect of his ministry and message before the issue was discussed at the general assembly.

When Paul presented to the leaders of the Jerusalem church the Gospel that he preached among the Gentiles, they were entirely satisfied. Paul's account was so satisfactory to the Apostles, that not only did they not require him to insist on the necessity of circumcision among the Gentiles, but they did not even require him to have his Gentile associate Titus circumcised, notwithstanding the strong pressure that was brought to bear upon them by the Judaizers to do so.

Paul, Barnabas and Titus refused to give up any ground to the Judaizers. Never for one moment, did they entertain the thought of compromising the truth of the Gospel for the bondage of Jewish legalism. Preserving the integrity of the Gospel was of paramount importance in their minds.

But not only did Paul successfully maintain his position with regard to the matter of Gentile immunity from the obligation of circumcision at the meeting, but the leaders of the Jerusalem church imposed no restrictions nor commands upon him relative to the matter. He informs us of this in verse **6**: *“But from those who were influential (whatever they were makes no difference to me; God shows no favoritism between people)—those influential leaders added nothing to my message.”*

At first glance, Paul's statement may seem arrogant, but that is certainly not his intent. His words are neither a denial of, nor a mark of disrespect for, their apostolic authority. He obviously respected them highly, otherwise he would not have consulted with them privately. He is in fact stating that they were the acknowledged authorities in the Christian community and rightly so. He is simply indicating that, although he accepts their office as Apostles, he is not intimidated by them, as the Judaizers were claiming that he was. He is also emphasizing the fact that the message of no Gospel minister is right and acceptable simply because of the reputation of the minister. "God" he says, "*shows no favoritism between people.*"

Paul is making the point that the unique privileges of the twelve original Apostles did not make their apostleship more legitimate or authoritative than His. God had chosen him to be an Apostle as much as He had chosen them. Paul says of the Jerusalem Apostles, "*Whatever they were makes no difference to me.*" It made no difference to Paul who these men were, what position they were holding, and what advantages they had. He was not hoping to receive an apostolic commission from them. He had already received his apostolic commission directly from God.

As **Kenneth Wuest** explains,

"Paul means no disrespect. He is merely asserting his own independence of them, thus by contrast setting off his apostolic authority in the light of theirs. He says that it made no difference with him what their former position was, referring to their former intercourse with the Lord Jesus. The knowing Christ after the flesh (**2 Corinthians 5:16**) gives one no position of preeminence in the Church. Furthermore, he says that God is no respecter of persons, literally, 'God does not receive the face of a man.' He shows no partiality because of a man's natural ability, his position or possessions in the various departments of human society."

Paul says, *“Those influential leaders added nothing to my message.”* The Apostles in Jerusalem contributed nothing to Paul’s knowledge or understanding of the Gospel, or to his authority to preach the Gospel. This should not surprise us when we recall what Paul had written earlier in chapter 1, verses 11 and 12:

11 Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the gospel I preached is not of human origin.

12 For I did not receive it or learn it from any human source; instead I received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.

(New English Translation)

Paul had no doubts about his calling and his revelation. Since he had received his message and authority from Christ Himself, what could men, even the original Apostles, add to the Gospel that he preached? The leaders of the church in Jerusalem could not communicate any additional facts or truths to Paul, regarding the basic Gospel message of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone!

Paul informs his readers in verse 7, that in contrast to the idea that the apostles in Jerusalem added anything to his message, they recognized his apostleship as being on the same level with Peter’s apostleship. He writes, *“On the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised.”*

Paul states here that instead of the Jerusalem Apostles siding with the Judaizers, they came boldly over to his side after they had heard the issue discussed in private. They acknowledged that his message was of divine origin and affirmed it as God’s truth without reservation. Not only did the Apostles in Jerusalem not provide Paul with any additional information relative to the content of the Gospel, but on the contrary, they wholeheartedly endorsed both his ministry and his message. They

recognized that he was “*entrusted*” with the Gospel to the uncircumcised.

The Greek word translated “*entrusted*” means, in this context, “to entrust a thing to one.” In this case, Paul a Jew, was entrusted with taking the Gospel to the “*uncircumcised*,” a metaphorical description of the Gentiles. The word is in the **perfect tense** which implies that Paul’s commission as an Apostle to the Gentiles was a permanent one.

Paul’s statement that he was entrusted with the Gospel to the uncircumcised (Gentiles), in the same way that Peter was entrusted with the Gospel to the circumcised (Jews), must not be understood to mean that there are two different Gospels, one for the Gentiles and another for the Jews. Paul is saying that the leaders recognized that God had assigned different **areas of ministry** to different men. In light of this, the responsibility of taking the Gospel of grace to the Gentiles was committed to him, and the responsibility of taking the very same Gospel to the Jews was committed to Peter. In other word, the distinction was not one of **content** but of the **persons** addressed. Apart from his visit to the Samaritans (**Acts 8**) and to the household of Cornelius (**Acts 10**), Peter had centered his ministry primarily among the Jews. Paul had been called as God’s special ambassador to the Gentiles. So, it was agreed that each man would minister in the sphere assigned to him by God.

The leaders of the Jerusalem church recognized and acknowledged that Paul had been made an Apostle to the Gentiles in the same way that Peter had been made an Apostle to the Jews. They understood that Paul’s ministry to the Gentiles had been entrusted it to him by God. The original Apostles came to the conclusion that Paul had a commission equal to Peter’s, because they saw that God had wrought just as great spiritual works through the one as through the other. Both ministries had clear evidence of God’s miraculous confirmation,

Paul confirms this in verse **8**. He writes, “(for he who empowered Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles).”

Commenting on this verse, **Kenneth Wuest** writes the following:

“This verse is a parenthetical statement. It confirms the contents of the preceding verse, namely that God delegated to Paul the responsibility of giving the gospel to the Gentiles, and to Peter, the responsibility of giving the same message to the Jews. Paul’s reasoning is as follows. He recognizes without hesitation Peter’s apostleship and its divine source. Then he proves that the recognition of his apostleship given by the Jerusalem apostles was merited, because his experience in preaching the gospel among the Gentiles was equal to and like in character to their efforts among the Jews. He says that God who wrought effectually in Peter’s work among the Jews, did the same with reference to his work among the Gentiles. All of which means that both Peter and Paul were recipients of the blessing of God in their work for Him, which is tantamount to saying that He gave recognition to each one as an apostle by divine appointment.”

This of course, does not mean that Paul would never seek to evangelize Jews. We know for certain that Paul had a great burden on his heart for his Jewish brethren. In **Romans 9:1-3**, he writes,

1 I am telling the truth in Christ (I am not lying!), for my conscience assures me in the Holy Spirit—

2 I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart.

3 For I could wish that I myself were accursed—cut off from Christ—for the sake of my people, my fellow countrymen.

(New English Translation)

And in verse **1** of the following chapter he writes, “*Brothers and sisters, my heart’s desire and prayer to God on behalf of my fellow Israelites is for their salvation*” (**New English Translation**).

Luke’s account of Paul’s ministry in the book of **Acts** reveals that when Paul came to a city, he would first go to the Jewish synagogue, if there was one, and start his work among his own people. In the same way Peter was not excluded from ministering to the Gentiles. But each man would concentrate his work in the area assigned to him by the Holy Spirit.

What Paul is saying in verse **8** is that it was the same Spirit of God Who energized the work of both Peter and himself, to two different mission fields, both preaching the same message. The same Holy Spirit Who “*empowered*” Peter “*empowered*” Paul, and the Holy Spirit has only one Gospel!

The implication of Paul’s statement is that the Gospel that he preached, and the Gospel that Peter preached, worked effectively because they were not two different Gospels, but the very same Gospel independent of ethnicity. In addition it speaks of God’s seal of approval resting upon the work of both Peter and Paul, and thus upon their apostleship. The only solution was to view the situation from God’s perspective: Paul and Peter represented unity and diversity in the body of Christ.

In verse **9** Paul writes, “*And when James, Cephas, and John, who had a reputation as pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*”

In this verse, Paul identifies James, Peter and John as “*pillars*” of the Jerusalem Church. In fact, it is likely that these 3 leaders are the subjects of **Galatians 2:6-10**, and Paul specifically names them in this verse. The word “*pillars*,” is a translation of the Greek word **stulos**: (**stoo’-los**), which was used to speak of the literal pillars or columns of buildings.

The word was also used figuratively in Classical Greek in the same sense as Paul uses it in this passage, to refer to a person's stabilizing character.

The Church is looked upon as a temple of God, and James, Peter and John, among others, were looked upon as supporters of the Church, men of distinction and prominence.

Kenneth Wuest has an interesting comment in respect of James' name being mentioned first by Paul. He says,

"James is mentioned first by Paul, and for four possible reasons.

First, Paul showed his respect to the mother-church at Jerusalem and its highly esteemed leader.

Second, this James was the brother of our Lord.

Third, he had presided at the Council.

Fourth, his well-known strictness as to the observance of the Mosaic law gave special weight to his support of Gentile freedom from the law."

Paul says that when James, Peter and John, "*recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.*"

The leaders of the Jerusalem church recognized, or perceived the "grace" that had been given to Paul. The grace referred to here, does not so much mean the grace that regenerated him and led him to faith in Jesus Christ. Nor is it so much a reference to that aspect of grace that, according to **Titus 2:12**, "*trains us to reject godless ways and worldly desires and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age*" (**New English Translation**). The grace mentioned in this verse is a

reference to the favour that had been shown to Paul by the Head of the church, the Lord Jesus Christ, in conferring the ministry of an Apostle upon him, and so abundantly blessing his labours among the Gentiles.

Paul speaks about this aspect of grace in **1 Corinthians 15:9-10**:

9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

10 But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me has not been in vain. In fact, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God with me.

(New English Translation).

The leaders of the Jerusalem church saw the significance of the grace given to Paul's apostleship. It was not so much that Paul himself had such a great ministry; it was the grace of God working in him.

The phrase, "*the right hand of fellowship,*" was an idiom meaning to make an agreement usually with the shaking of hands. In the Near East, to clasp the right hand of a person was to make a solemn vow of friendship and was also a mark of fellowship, or partnership. This action could also include the sense of making a covenant. In this case it was not just a shaking of hands but a sharing of mission and purpose, the proclamation of the Gospel to all mankind.

Kenneth Wuest makes the following comments relative to James, Peter and John extending to Barnabas and Paul the right hand of fellowship:

"The details of the compact are found in the words 'that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.' The agreement therefore was that Paul and Barnabas should go as apostles to the Gentiles, and the Jerusalem apostles were to go as apostles to the Jews, both groups taking the same gospel...But the agreement was more than this. It was an acknowledgment of apostolic equality. Paul would not be content with the mere approbation of the Twelve upon his

missionary labors. He needed to show the Galatians that he was an apostle equal in rank to the apostles at Jerusalem. In addition to that, he deemed it necessary to show them that his contention for *Gentile* freedom from the obligation of circumcision was sustained in the Jerusalem council."

The Greek word translated "*fellowship*" is **koinónia**: (**koy-nohn-ee'-ah**), which speaks of the active, joint participation, cooperation and sharing in a common interest or activity. The word describes a close association involving mutual interests. The idea is of sharing the things of Christ. So, clearly in this context, Paul and the Jerusalem Apostles share a mutual interest in the integrity and propagation of the Gospel.

Brothers and sisters, this was one of the most significant events in the history of the church! James, Peter, John, Barnabas and Paul stood with hands clasped in official fellowship, in the presence of all the leaders of the Jerusalem church. Four of them were to be the instruments used by the Holy Spirit to write 20 of the 27 books of the New Testament! It was a dramatic conclusion to their agreement for cooperation in independent areas of ministry.

The original Apostles gave full sanction to Paul's ministry, acknowledging his commission, received by revelation, to be identical with the one they had received from Jesus in Person. The clasping of hands signified wholehearted agreement in receiving Paul into the apostleship. This confirmation of Paul and the Gospel he preached was a complete answer to the false claims and accusations of those who opposed him. It was a clear sign to all that the "pillars" of the Church fully endorsed God's work in and through Paul.

I want to end this evening with the words of the Welsh minister, **Selywn Hughes**:

"Truly, in making an effort to go outside of ourselves and relate to others, we receive a wider awareness and a deeper understanding of

God. This has been one of the greatest and most exciting discoveries of my life. The more I have given myself to my brothers and sisters in Christ, the greater has been my awareness and understanding of God... The more I have focused on learning to listen—really listen—to my brothers and sisters in Christ, the more I have found that the effort I have made to do this has resulted in a heightening of my ability to listen to God. And the more I have sought to understand the mystery of His dealings in their lives, the more I have come to know the depth and beauty of His character. Although down the years I have come to know Him intimately in prayer, I believe I can say that I know Him even better because I have met Him in others."