

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON EIGHTEEN)

“CONTENDING FOR THE GOSPEL” (PART 4)

GALATIANS 2:1-5

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

1 Then after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking Titus along too.

2 I went there because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did so only in a private meeting with the influential people, to make sure that I was not running—or had not run—in vain.

3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek.

4 Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves.

5 But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.

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.

In verse **2**, Paul says that when he went to Jerusalem, he secured 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 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.

In verse **3** he writes, *“Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek.”*

Paul explains here that when he 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 Titus circumcised, even though he was a Greek.

Brothers and sisters, the issue surrounding Titus was a critical one. Titus was not like Timothy whose mother was a Jewess and whose father was a Gentile. Titus was a “pure” Gentile. Both his parents were Gentiles. In Jerusalem, Paul identified completely with Titus. He says that Titus, *“was **with** me.”* Paul had already mentioned in verse **1** that Titus had accompanied himself and Barnabas to Jerusalem, so why does he find it necessary in verse **3** to state that Titus was with him? He does so because he desires to emphasize his close association with an uncircumcised Gentile.

The Pulpit Commentary has this to say in respect of Paul’s conduct relative to Titus: *“We cannot...but marvel at St. Paul’s great courage in thus acting. Not only was this paraded fellowship with Titus sure to give deep offence to the vast majority of his Christian brethren, but it might also well expose him to serious personal risks among the highly inflammable populace of the city.”*

We must understand that great pressure was exerted to have Titus circumcised. Paul does not write, “**I** was not compelled to circumcise Titus,” but “**T**itus was not compelled to be circumcised.” By thus stating it, Paul is implying that it was Titus himself who was being pressured.

In verse **4**, Paul makes reference to the group that insisted upon the circumcision of Titus. He writes, “*Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves.*”

The phrase, “*false brothers*” is a translation of the Greek word, **pseudadelphos**: (**psyoo-dad’-el-fos**), which, according to **Thayer’s Greek Lexicon**, refers to, “a false brother, i. e. one who professes...to be a Christian, but is destitute of Christian knowledge and piety.” These persons appeared to be genuine believers but in reality they were staunch adversaries of the truth of the Gospel. These imposters pretended to be followers of Christ, having somehow infiltrated the ranks of the church with the objective of destroying the doctrines of grace from within the church.

Paul says that these false brothers, “*slipped in unnoticed.*” The phrase is the translation of a Greek word which literally describes something that has been brought in by the side of something else. The word conveys the sense of being brought in secretly, or under false pretenses. The word was used of spies or traitors who infiltrate an opposing camp.

They “*slipped in unnoticed*” Paul says, “*to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves.*” The phrase, “*to spy on,*” is the translation of a Greek word which means, “to inspect, view closely, in order to spy out and plot against.” Paul is using vocabulary from the world of espionage, because his opponents, the Judaizers, were conducting covert operations. He compares them to secret agents who are bent on discovering the weak points of their enemy’s military position. In this case, the covert activities of the “false brothers” were

focused on the freedom that Paul, Barnabas, and the Gentile believers had in Christ Jesus.

The “*freedom*” mentioned here is the believer’s freedom from the Mosaic law, which would have been surrendered in principle if the Gentiles had been compelled to be circumcised. The Greek word translated “*freedom*” describes the state of being free and is the exact opposite of enslavement or bondage.

Brothers and sisters, believers are not in bondage to the Mosaic Law, nor to any extra-biblical system of rules. Believers are under a new law which Paul describes in **Romans 8:1-4**:

1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.

2 For the law of the life-giving Spirit in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.

3 For God achieved what the law could not do because it was weakened through the flesh. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and concerning sin, he condemned sin in the flesh,

4 so that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

(New English Translation)

Paul explains that believers have freedom only, “*in Christ Jesus.*” The believer’s freedom is not found in the Mosaic law or any other system of rule keeping. The believer’s freedom is found in a Person; it is found in Jesus Christ, and it is experienced as we daily learn to abide in Him and thus to experience the life giving power that flows from the Holy Spirit.

Martin Luther rightly says that, “Human reason can think only in terms of the Law. It mumbles: ‘This I have done, this I have not done.’ But faith looks to Jesus Christ, the Son of God, given into death for the

sins of the whole world. To turn one's eyes away from Jesus means to turn them to the Law. True faith lays hold of Christ and leans on Him **alone**. Our opponents cannot understand this. In their blindness they cast away the precious pearl, Christ, and hang onto their shabby works. They have no idea what faith is. How can they teach faith to others?"

It is very important for us to understand that freedom in Christ is not the right to do as **we** please, but the power to do as **He** pleases! True liberty is living as we **should**, not as we **please**. As **John MacArthur** states, "Christian freedom is not license. When we become free in Christ we lose our freedom to sin, of which we were once a slave. In Christ, 'having been freed from sin, [we] become slaves of righteousness' (**Romans 6:18**)."

The ultimate aim of the Judaizers was "to make...slaves" of the Gentile believers. The phrase, "make us slaves," is a translation of the Greek word **katadouloó**: (**kat-ad-oo-lo'-o**), which means, "to bring into bondage, enslave." It means to enslave utterly, absolutely, completely and without qualification. The idea is of reducing someone to abject slavery. **Katadoulouo** is the antithesis of the Greek word translated "freedom."

In the present context, the word clearly indicates that it was the desire of the "false brothers" to bring the Gentile believers into a state of absolute bondage by imposing on them an impossible system of works-righteousness.

What was Paul's response to the wicked conspiracies of the Judaizers? We have the answer in verse **5**: "*But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*"

The Scottish theologian **William Barclay** has an interesting comment regarding this verse. He says, "There is a battle behind this passage; and it seems likely that the leaders of the Church urged Paul, for

peace's sake, to compromise, and to give in, in the case of Titus. But Paul stood like a rock. He knew that this was a test case, and he would not yield one inch for one moment. To yield would have been to accept the slavery of the law and to turn his back on the Christian freedom which is in Christ. In the end Paul's determination won the day."

Notice that Paul says, "*But we did not surrender to them even for a moment.*" The "*we*" indicates that Paul, Barnabas and Titus refused to give up any ground to the Judaizers. The Greek word translated "*not*" is **oude**: (oo-deh'), which indicates absolute negation. In other words, it never crossed their mind to yield any ground on the essential truths of the Gospel.

The phrase, "*even for a moment*" is an idiom for the smallest increment of time in the Greek language. Paul did not compromise with the "false brothers" one iota! He gave them no time at all! Never for one moment, did Paul entertain the thought of compromising the truth of the Gospel for the bondage of Jewish legalism. He had lived for most of his life in a works-based, performance-driven religious system and he, more than anyone else, understood its enslaving power. He was not going to rest until the truth of the Gospel of grace prevailed.

It is no wonder that **Spurgeon** remarked, "It is impossible for us to estimate how much we owe to the apostle Paul. Of all who have ever lived, we who are Gentiles owe more to him than to any other man." The reason for the resolute, uncompromising, unyielding stance adopted by Paul and his associates, is stated at the end of the verse: "*That the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*"

Preserving the integrity of the Gospel was of paramount importance in the mind of Paul and it should also be of paramount importance in ours! There is absolutely no room for compromise when the eternal destinies of men and women hang in the balance!

What does Paul mean here by the words, "*the truth of the gospel?*"

Phil Newton comments that, "There are plenty who say they believe in being justified by faith, but they refuse to qualify that with by faith **alone**. For they will add to the gospel something of their own making. To this we must stand against without flinching. I agree with Martin Luther, 'For a true and steadfast faith must lay hold upon nothing, but Christ alone.'"

The "*truth of the gospel*" denotes its genuine purity. We must understand that the Judaizers did not set aside the Gospel altogether, but mixed it with their own legalistic ideas, thus making it "another gospel" -a false one. This is always the case when we make even the smallest departure from the Gospel of the grace of God. Paul stood absolutely firm because the truth of the Gospel was at stake.

As **Kenneth Wuest** observes, "This was a grave crisis. The entire status of *Gentile Christianity* was involved in the case of Titus. The question as to whether *Christianity* was to be merely a modified form of legalistic Judaism or a system of pure grace, was at stake. Justification by faith was on trial. Circumcision would have set it aside."

Paul earnestly desired for the truth of the Gospel to "*remain*" with the Galatian believers. The Greek word translated "*remain*" is **diamenó**: (**dee-am-en'-o**), which means, "to stay permanently, remain permanently, continue; to persevere." The idea is of continuing on completely. In this verse, the word is used figuratively of the Gospel continuing in association with the Galatians. It expresses the relation of the Gospel's active bearing on a person's life. In other words, Paul knows that the only way the Gospel will continue to exert its life-transforming power in the inner-heart lives of the Galatian believers, is if it is not corrupted by the legalistic teaching of the Judaizers.

Don Fortner explains that it does not matter whether legalism is preached and taught as a basis for justification, as a measure of

sanctification, as a rule of life, as a motive for Christian service, or as a grounds of reward in heaven-all such preaching and teaching is evil.

Fortner says,

"The issue is the motive and attitude of the heart. The legalist is motivated by **fear**. The believer is motivated by **love**. The legalist hopes to be rewarded for his work. The believer hopes to honor God in his work. All law service is looked upon and performed as a matter of duty. Prayer, Bible reading, attendance at public worship and tithing always have an element of either the fear of punishment or the promise of reward, as they are performed by the legalist. The believer prays because his heart longs to commune with God, reads the Word because he wants to know God, attends worship because he desires to hear from God and gives because he loves God. The service and work of love is considered a privilege by the one who performs it. And you can be sure of this: God will never accept anything except that which is done with a willing heart (**2 Corinthians 8:12**)."

Brothers and sisters, the Gospel of the grace of God liberates us. The gospel of works enslaves us! Paul knew how precious spiritual freedom was. He knew the price that Jesus Christ paid on the Cross to purchase it for us. He also knew how easy it was to surrender that freedom and return to spiritual bondage. This is why Paul wrote to the Galatians with such urgency. They had believed the Gospel of grace; they had gained true spiritual freedom by putting their faith in the person and work of Christ. But now they were in danger of allowing themselves to be enslaved again by false brothers who wanted to add the law of Moses to the Gospel of grace.

Brothers and sisters, the Lord Jesus Christ has given us true liberty through the Gospel. In Christ we have been freed from sin, Satan and the law. In him we are free from all religious traditions, customs and superstitions. Neither the church nor those who preach the Gospel have any authority to bring God's people under bondage again, by making

their own rules, regulations and standards for Christian conduct.
Believers are to ensure that they use their freedom for the Glory of God.
We must avoid both legalism and licentiousness.