

No Bondage Allowed

Galatians 2:1-5

With Study Questions

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Let us remember how the Apostle Paul is laboring to defend his apostolic office and message which is **“not from men nor through man, but through Jesus Christ and God the Father who raised Him from the dead” (1:1)**. The resurrection of Christ is mentioned, realizing that the message of the power of God to regenerate – to make spiritually alive, by God-given faith alone is – under attack. It was under attack then and still is to this day – in the church.

Paul, over and above trying to simply win an argument desires the recipients of his letter also be the recipients of **“Grace...and peace from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ” (1:3)**. This grace and peace is ours when we come to realize and embrace the fact that He **“gave Himself for our sins, that He might deliver us from this present evil age” (1:4)**. This deliverance we have is not according to the will or power of man but **“according to the will of our God and Father” (1:4)**. This must be emphasized in order for us to keep our own pride and instinctive desires to be self-congratulatory in check. It is not the power or will of self, or man, who receives the glory but it is God **“to whom be glory forever and ever” (1:5)**.

It was a source of astonishment to Paul that these churches were **“turning away so soon from Him who called (them) in the grace of Christ, to a different gospel” (1:6)**. This is not so much addressing the perseverance of the saints at an individual level (that is, people losing their salvation) as much as the tendency for churches to be swayed from their appointed task (preaching a true biblical gospel) by powerful, charismatic personalities.

As much as these other messages might have had a Christian flavor to them, these messages were **“not another” (1:7)** gospel at all but were a perversion of **“the gospel of Christ” (1:7)**. Those who pervert the message of the gospel are not to be taken lightly but are to be **“accursed” (1:8, 9)**.

The message Paul brings is not designed to please men or redefine God. Paul is not an inventor of Christ but rather **“a bondservant of Christ” (1:10)**. What Paul gives us is a message straight from heaven. It is the means by which we are rescued from slavery to the world, Satan, and our own natures. It is also the means by which we are brought into slavery to abundance, life and righteousness. This kind of deliverance requires a message that is **“not according to man” (1:11)**. It requires a message that comes **“through the revelation of Jesus Christ” (1:12)**. It is this message that lies on the pages before us.

Seeking to destroy the weight of the argument of his Jewish detractors, Paul conveys that he was the quintessential Jew. He **“persecuted the church of God beyond measure and tried to destroy it.”** He had **“advanced in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries in my own nation” (1:14)** But that would

all end since God had “separated (Paul) from (his) mother’s womb and called (Paul) through His grace” (1:16). It was God’s will that He would “reveal His Son” (1:16) through Paul, that Paul “might preach Him among the Gentiles” (1:16). Paul did not look to human instruction for his ministry but had very limited contact with the other apostles (1:17). After a period of “three years (he) went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him (only) fifteen days” (1:18). The churches of Judea didn’t know Paul by face at all (1:22) but as a result of the faith that he preached (1:23) “they glorified God in (him)” (1:24).

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. ²And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. ³Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), ⁵to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Galatians 2:1-5).

To summarize these five verses, Paul finally did spend a significant amount of time with the other apostles and there was no dispute among them as to the truth of the gospel. The effort to turn the true gospel into a religion of bondage was not put up with for a minute by the true apostles.

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me (Galatians 2:1).

Very Little Contact

Have you ever asked two people who were at the same event (maybe a baseball game) to give an explanation of what happened? Sometimes you wonder if they were at the same game.

Here we see that it was most likely many years before Paul had any in-depth contact with the other apostles. Most companies, organizations, churches or movements need daily or weekly meetings in order to stay on the same page (usually with little success) regarding the principles, order of priorities or themes of their charters. They develop short little mission statements in order to help their employees know what they’re supposed to be about. Paul had very little contact with the other apostles, yet the harmony of the message is without flaw, for the teacher was the Holy Spirit of God Himself.

Harmony of Scripture

From a purely literary analysis, how amazing is the Bible? Here we have, not just one book, but sixty-six books written by forty different authors (of various backgrounds and vocations) over a fifteen hundred year period, and the unity of the message is beyond human explanation. Our nation has existed for less than three hundred years (in which time we've had consistent access to the printing press and other forms of mass communication) yet we can't decide if God should be included in our economy.

Congress opens in prayer; the Supreme Court opens with the words, "God bless this nation and honorable court;" all of our founding documents are laden with references to a Creator, yet in the relatively short period of three hundred years the most industrialized and progressive nation in the history of the world is embarrassingly confused. There was no confusion between Paul and the other apostles even though they had not communicated for many years.

And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain (Galatians 2:2).

And I went up by revelation,

When Paul finally did meet with the other apostles he went by, or because of a revelation, God told him to go. Notice that revelation is contained in Paul's argument for his apostleship. We should be careful not to use that term recklessly. Divine, unmediated revelation (God speaking directly) was unique to the apostles and prophets of God; it was what made them prophetic. Their word is the word of God. We call it the Bible.

...and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation,

So was Paul trying to figure out if he had his story straight? No. Paul did not go to the other apostles to receive instruction but to communicate to them what he had already been preaching for many years. We must keep in mind that Paul is responding to those who believed that the gospel must be accompanied by circumcision in order to take effect.

Paul, in the many years that he had preached, never preached that kind of a gospel. If Paul were in error, this would have been a perfect opportunity for the other apostles to demonstrate their rejection of him. They would have immediately declared Paul a heretic. Of course this did not happen.

So what was “**That gospel**” which Paul preached? “**That gospel**” which Paul preached was the message of justification by faith. And even though he might have even circumcised some (Timothy—Acts 16:3) in order to pacify those who were weak-minded,¹ he would never allow any human behavior to be mistakenly included in the justification of the sinner. We should not adorn the gospel message with trappings. Jesus alone suffered, died, and rose again. No human behavior can add to what He has sufficiently accomplished.

The Deception of the Church

Should we only worry about justification by faith when speaking to unbelievers? Are we all safe from this Galatian error? Keep in mind that the message in question here is not the message delivered to unbelievers (only) but primarily the message delivered to those who already had a profession of faith. They were brought into the church with a true gospel that was being supplanted by a gospel that had human ornamentation. The church lives in constant danger of infection. It is against this infection—the infecting of the cross with the feeble works of men—that we must wage war.

We see an example of Paul’s preaching in Acts 13,

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption;³⁷ but He whom God raised up saw no corruption.³⁸ Therefore let it be known to you, brethren, that through this Man [Jesus] is preached to you the forgiveness of sins;³⁹ and by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things from which you could not be justified by the law of Moses (brackets mine – Acts 13:36-39).

Justification (acquittal from the due penalty of our sins and the obtaining of a right standing with God) is by faith alone.

...lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.

How is it that Paul would have been running in vain? What Paul is not saying here is that he had to check his message with the other apostles in order to make sure that for the past fourteen years he hadn’t been preaching an inaccurate and empty gospel. As Calvin wrote,

The certainty of faith, indeed, does not depend on the agreement of human opinions; but, on the contrary, it is our duty to rest in

¹ Paul would bend over backwards to avoid unnecessary controversy. He became Jew to the Jews, etc.

the naked truth of God, so that neither men nor all the angels together, could shake our faith.²

But since we allow our faith to be shaken nonetheless by the caviling of naysayers, Paul brings in the affirmation of the fuller testimony of the apostles. To deny Paul, they must also deny Peter and James. The uniform testimony of Scripture is so harmonious that to deny the twenty-five verses of Philemon is to deny the epistle to the Romans, which is to deny the general epistles of James, Peter, John, and Jude, which is to deny the remaining books of the New Testament that is to deny the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament. All of this is madness. It is illogical, dark, and arrogant. But such is the case of the man enslaved to his own carnality. God must rescue us from such folly.

Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. ⁴And *this occurred* because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage) (Galatians 2:3, 4).

Yet not even Titus

What we read here hammers the coffin shut on those who believed that the works of men (circumcision) must be added to the grace of God in order for salvation to be achieved. Paul brought Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, into the midst of Jewish-Christian central. And they found his uncircumcised condition to be no problem concerning his standing before God.

There was then, and there always will be, false brethren who creep into the church seeking to subvert Christian liberty and bring God's children into bondage. There are some very obvious infractions and some not so obvious.

Baptismal Regeneration

I can't think of a more obvious effort in some churches to bring its congregants into bondage than the idea of being saved by water baptism. If it wasn't so sad it would be humorous how baptism (the new covenant anti-type of circumcision³) has become the subject of the same heresy. We see this in certain cults who demand baptism into their church as a necessary precondition for salvation. And of course we also see this in Roman Catholicism where it is asserted,

²Calvin, J. 1998. *Calvin's Commentaries: Galatians* (electronic ed.). Logos Library System; Calvin's Commentaries (Ga 2:2). Ages Software: Albany, OR

³ Circumcision and baptism were signs of the same thing—justification by faith (Romans 4:11).

The Lord himself affirms that Baptism is necessary for salvation...Baptism is necessary for salvation for those to whom the Gospel has been proclaimed and who have had the possibility of asking for this sacrament...by Baptism all sins are forgiven, original sin and all personal sins, as well as all punishment for sin⁴

Other modern violations might be the need to speak in tongues in order to be saved or membership in the church (any church which demands membership for salvation shouldn't be joined) or levels of piety, etc. It is not too difficult to see the obvious infractions. There are more subtle infractions and dangers.

Arminianism

Arminianism is a form of this error. It is a doctrine that asserts that the faith of man, which results in justification, is his autonomous contribution to his own salvation; this is a subtle perversion of the gospel. The faith which justifies is itself a gift from God (Hebrews 12:2) for which He must be praised.

Pleasure and Power

Pleasure and experiences of power can begin to seep into the category. When the legitimacy of your Christianity and the basis of your assurance before God is not faith in Christ accompanied by a will to be obedient to His law, but rather a feeling of joy or an experience of pleasure or power, we have taken a step in a bad direction.

Faith in Christ as our Savior is, of course, necessary for salvation. Trust in Christ as our Lord necessarily attends that salvation – it always follows. But the ability to manufacture power and pleasure turns the faith into an info-mercial. Christianity becomes Tony Robbins telling us how to succeed in life and business or that other guy with the boat and the girls who promises us real estate with no money or the silly fellow with all the question marks on his suit dancing around Capitol Hill.

For every success these guys produce ten thousand failures. It shouldn't surprise us that in modern crusades for every thousand people who walk forward, ten continue in the faith. A presentation of Christianity which requires experiences of power and pleasure may not be as blatant as salvation by baptism, but it can easily create the same bondage in those of us who simply don't get that stuff and therefore suspect that our faith is amiss.

⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, Second Edition*, (Libreria Editrice Vaticana, copyright 1994, 1997), p. 320, 321.

...to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you (Galatians 2:5).

Why wouldn't Paul just circumcise his students as he did Timothy in order to end the controversy? It may seem forbearing to abstain from, or participate in, certain behaviors in order to promote brotherly unity. But when the truth of the gospel is at stake, this behavior is unacceptable.

We can, and should, exercise forbearance, patience, and tolerance in a great many areas. Who is the best football team? Where should we go to eat? What city is the best to live in? What outfit looks cutest? But when it comes to gospel of Christ, we are not to yield. It is on this hill that we must build and maintain the bunker. The very truth of the gospel is at stake. We have already discovered that there are false gospels. So in the loosest sense it is not the gospel that is at stake, just the true gospel.

Paul was preaching Christ and Him crucified. The church must hold to this message. Is love (known as charity) more important than Christ? May it never be! And yet it can become His adversary. Let us conclude with the words of Luther:

But faith being in her own proper office, has no other object but Jesus Christ the Son of God, delivered to death for the sins of the whole world. It looks not to charity: it says not, what have I done? what have I offended? what have I deserved? but what has Christ done? What has He deserved? Here the truth of the gospel answers you: He has redeemed you from your sin, from the devil, and from eternal death. Faith therefore acknowledges that in this one person, Jesus Christ, it has forgiveness of sins and eternal life. He that turns his eyes from this object has no true faith, but a fantasy and a vain opinion, and turns his eyes from the promise to the law, which terrifies and drives to desperation. So he who apprehends Christ by faith, although he be ever so much terrified with the law, and with the weight of his sins, yet may he be bold to glory that he is righteous. How, or by what means? Even by that precious pearl, Christ Jesus, whom he possesses by faith. This our adversaries understand not, and therefore they cast away this precious pearl Christ, and in His place they set charity⁵

⁵Luther, M. 1996. *Commentary on Galatians*. Index created by Christian Classics Foundation. (electronic ed.) (Ga 2:6). Christian Classics Foundation: Simpsonville SC

Questions for Study

1. What are some reasons why it might be significant that Paul did not have contact with the other apostles for such a long time (pages 3, 4)?
2. Did Paul go to the other apostles to make sure he had the gospel correct (page 4)?
3. What is “**That gospel**” which Paul preached (page 5)?
4. What is the infection that continually seeks to enter the church (page 5)?
5. In what respect did Paul fear he had run in vain (pages 5, 6)?
6. Why would Paul bring in the confirmation of the other apostles (page 6)?
7. What are some ways we see the attempt to subvert Christian liberty (pages 6, 7)?
8. What was Paul’s response to the attempt to subvert Christian liberty (page 8)?
9. How can love (charity) become an adversary of Christ (page 8)?