2-16-25

Galatians 2:1-10

Paul is now truly in a fight for the souls of the Galatians. They are being led astray by a person or persons who say that they must follow all the law of Moses in addition to believing in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. This is a different Gospel; this is not the Gospel that leads to salvation. The Gospel that leads to salvation is by faith alone in Jesus Christ who sufficiently competed all necessary atoning work on the cross. To add to that is heresy.

One of the primary tactics of these false teaches, commonly called Judaizers, was to undermine Paul. Paul was the one who originally brought them the true Gospel message which had nothing to do with following laws or works. So these Judaizers did their best to disqualify Paul from his standing as an apostle; and they maintained that he was no where near the standing of the apostles in Jerusalem. There are indications that these Judaizers even claimed to be sent by the Jerusalem apostles or by James, the head of the Jerusalem church.

Because of these things, Paul is forced to strenuously defend himself. He does so by giving a brief history of his conversion and his ministry; with a focus on the source of his Gospel and his interactions with the Jerusalem apostles. He has already pointed out that he received the Gospel directly from Jesus Himself, along with physically seeing the resurrected Christ. He didn’t contact any other apostles for three years after his conversion and then he only saw Peter and Jesus’ half-brother, James. His main point then was that the Christian churches were praising God on his account after learning of his conversion.

While Paul’s conversion was real, let’s take this as an opportunity to consider something that happens occasionally in our day and age: A celebrity who comes out and claims to have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Christians tend to react in one of two extremes. Either they will dismiss it entirely as being a publicity stunt, or will be quick to put the person on a pedestal and parade them before others as a good example and spokesperson.

We really need to avoid both extremes. Our proper response should be a cautious hope and prayers for their conversion to be genuine; along with prayers for the Lord’s guidance and that they be properly discipled. If we immediately write off their claim as being false, then we are judging their heart which we are strictly forbidden to do. If we lift them up like a trophy or a prize, then we run a serious risk of having egg on our face if their conversion turns out to be false. Anyone who professes to turn to Christ must be given time so we are better able to see if they bear fruit.

Paul writes that after fourteen years, he returned to Jerusalem and met with at least some of the Jerusalem apostles. He mentions that Barnabas went with him. The Galatians were probably familiar with Barnabas since he was with Paul on the first missionary journey into Galatia. So Paul had a witness on this trip to Jerusalem and he also had a witness in Titus. Titus was a Greek and so he was a Gentile like the Galatians were.

Barnabas shows up several times in the book of Acts. His name is a nickname which means “son of encouragement”. His actual name was Joseph and he was from the tribe of Levi. Being a Levite, he would have known the law of Moses; so for him to evangelize with Paul in Galatia without enforcing the Law would support Paul’s Gospel of faith in Christ alone.

Now Paul tells us that he went back to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles because of a revelation. He does not tell us what the revelation was. It may have been something he received directly from Jesus or it may have come through another prophet. We don’t know where it came from or exactly what it was. Apparently, we don’t need to know or the Holy Spirit would have had Paul write it in his letter. Regardless, Paul went to the leadership of the Jerusalem church and submitted to them the Gospel he had been preaching to the Gentiles.

Perhaps Barnabas came to back him up since he was already known to the apostles. Perhaps Titus was brought in order to demonstrate the fruit that came from Paul’s Gentile ministry. I think the main point to see here is that Paul did submit his preaching to the church leadership. Now Paul is walking a tightrope here. He has to be adamant that his Gospel came directly from Jesus Christ alone. But he also has to show that it aligns with the Gospel of the other apostles. In this way, he demonstrates the authenticity of his preaching because of its source; but also shows the fallacy of the Judaizer’s claim that the Jerusalem apostles are superior to him.

I think the important point here for us is the idea of submission. Submission is an important concept throughout the Bible. Of course, our human nature screams against the idea of submission; but then, our human nature isn’t very happy with any of the things of God. It is a happy time when the Holy Spirit brings us to the point of being comfortable with submission. Now by Biblical submission we don’t mean being a doormat. We don’t mean forgoing our rights. In the book of Acts, Paul used his Roman citizenship to avoid a beating and to frighten some arrogant officials. Nor does it mean to submit to everything. Obviously, we should not submit to temptation or to evil.

For the Christian, the first priority is to submit to Christ. That’s what it means to call Him “Lord”. We follow His commands; not because it will get us into heaven, but because we recognize that we owe Him everything which in turn brings us to the place of wanting to be pleasing to Him. To submit to Jesus means we are His servants. Again, our nature doesn’t like that idea; but if we are not His servant, we are a servant of satan. There is no other option; we will serve one or the other.

Wives are to be submissive to their husbands. Notice that’s not women submissive to men. And husbands are to use that authority for the wife’s benefit; so that she may grow and flourish in the Lord. As Paul demonstrated, we are to be submissive to church leadership. He presented his Gospel to them for verification. The book of Acts records other times where Paul submitted to their suggestions and he accepted their authority. This is actually a good reason to join a church; it indicates submission to a godly authority.

At the same time, Christians are to be submissive and accountable to each other. Church leadership has the responsibility to seriously listen to any member of the congregations’ concerns. As Paul points out, God shows no partiality; leadership is no more important than the newest convert. It’s just that each has their own responsibilities in the body of Christ.

The idea of submission to other Christians, especially in a church setting, is a blessing from God and for our benefit. It is not to hinder us or keep us confined. For example, sometimes we may feel a calling to do something. If it’s something simple like just calling someone who is on your heart, that can be easily done with a quick prayer on your own. But perhaps you feel led to sell everything and move to Central America. You really need to talk with other Christians who care about you and listen to what the Holy Spirit may tell them. Perhaps someone will say something to keep you from making a big mistake; or perhaps you will receive the encouragement you need and the direction to follow through.

So Paul makes it very clear that the apostles in Jerusalem preached the exact same Gospel that he did. It was salvation by faith alone and not by works or law. The other apostles were not enforcing the law and the proof of that was that they had no problem with Titus. None of them even suggested that he be circumcised, which was the first basic step for the Judaizers.

Paul then goes on to explain that the problem was “*false brethren*”. This term appears to be in the same category as “another gospel”. There is no other Gospel, and these false brethren are not Christian brethren. In fact, they have sneaked into the Christian assemblies; they have come in secret; they are spies; and their whole purpose is to put Christians into bondage. What’s happened in the Galatian church is not an isolated incident. These Judaizers are in Jerusalem and we will see later that they came to the church in Syrian Antioch.

These people are wolves in sheep’s clothing. They come into the church acting as Christians, but then seek to bind the people with rules. We spoke earlier of Christian submission. Submission to Christ is not bondage. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. It is only in submission to Christ that we are truly free. We are free from the law; we are free from the consequences of sin and death. We have Christian liberty.

Christian liberty does not mean that we can do whatever we want to. It means that we are free to do the best we can to follow Christ. Life has lots of grey areas and sometimes we may not be sure of the best way to go. But if we do our best to follow the Spirit’s leading, the Lord will work things out. And that is so much freer that having to follow a set of rules that may not cover whatever we are dealing with. I think that’s part of the reason the religious leaders made up so many rules on top of what God commanded. They were trying to cover every situation. From the law, we have a basic understanding of what is pleasing to God and what His character is. With this basic knowledge of God’s morality, we are free in Christ to follow Him.

Paul continues his tightrope walk. He has submitted his Gospel to the elders of the Jerusalem church; but now he makes it known that they did not take away from his Gospel or add to it. The word Paul preached remained exactly as Jesus had revealed it to him. And it was the same as Jesus had revealed it to the known apostles. In spite of what the Judaizers said, Paul was on par with those who had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry.

And Paul makes a very important point almost as an aside; that God shows no partiality. Peter and James and John and Paul and you and I stand before God on exactly the same footing. We are forgiven only on account of the blood of Jesus Christ. Our salvation is based solely an accepting Jesus as Saviour. We receive reward in heaven based on our works; but whether we arrive to a great crown or smelling of smoke, our entrance is all Jesus.

The Jerusalem apostles recognized that Paul had a somewhat different calling from what they did. They were mainly called to the Jewish nation; to God’s chosen people. Paul was called to evangelize the Gentiles. Obviously, the Bible lets us know that they weren’t strictly contained within these boundaries; but they had a primary calling. They had different callings; but the same Gospel. And it is the same for us. Each of us has gifts that God has given us for the functioning of the His church. Each of us has the same Gospel. Each of us is saved by the blood of Christ. And God doesn’t show partiality regarding any of our gifts or our persons. The dividing walls have been taken down, and none of us is any better in the eyes of God than any other.

And that really comes out when the Jerusalem pillars extended to Paul and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship. Notice that word “fellowship”. It’s not of friendship or acceptance or greeting. That phrase means they were on equal footing; they were all apostles who counted each other as equals. That was important for the churches of Galatia to hear; it’s important for us.

May we each extend to one another the right hand of fellowship. We are equally Christians in God’s sight. We are equally beloved in God’s heart. And these things are only due to the work of Jesus on the cross. If we think on these things, it will be easier to have unity in this church body; as it would in any church body. Unity isn’t agreeing on everything; just the foundational truths. Unity is overlooking the differences in personality that can sometimes aggravate us. Unity is being quick to seek forgiveness and even quicker to forgive. The right hand of fellowship is key to a church surviving and thriving.

Prayer

Lord God, we know that there are many in the world who would try to present to us a false Gospel. We pray for them because they are unwitting accomplices of satan. May the light of Christ shine into their hearts and minds, and free them from the bondage they are in.

But also Lord, keep us from being deceived. May Your Holy Spirit ever call to our minds the proper Scripture so that we don’t fall for any of the lies of the enemy. Keep us in the company of other Christians who care for us and have discernment; that they, too, help keep our feet on the narrow path of Jesus Christ.

Thank You Lord, for the gifts You bestow upon each of Your children. Guide us that we will use these gifts to increase the Kingdom of Christ. Guide us that we will use these gifts to edify the body of Christ. Illuminate to each of us what our gift might be and instill a selfless desire to use it for others and to glorify our Saviour Jesus.

It is in His name we pray

Amen