

THE GOSPEL OF GRACE UNDER ATTACK GALATIANS 2:1-10

INTRODUCTION AND REVIEW

There is a story told about the early origins of Rome as a nation. Historians are uncertain as to whether there is a factual basis for it. We do know that the city of Rome was oppressed for a time in the sixth century BC by a people group to the north known as the Etruscans. At one point supposedly the Romans kicked the Etruscans out of the city. Some months later the Etruscans returned unannounced. The Romans had not noticed the approach of the enemy army until they got close to the city.

Roman farmers working in the fields were the first to see the approach of the enemy. They rushed back to the city to alert their people. A man named Horatius quickly took a lead and formulated a plan. There was but one bridge across the Tiber River leading in to Rome. So Horatius grabbed two other brave warriors and went to the far edge of the narrow bridge. Supposedly other Romans rushed out to dismantle the bridge so that the Etruscan army would not have access to the city.

As the Romans behind them began dismantling the bridge. Horatius and his two brave friends fought off the Etruscans trying to get across that bridge. The three were great warriors, and their was only a narrow way for the enemy to get close to them. Just as the bridge was about to collapse, Horatius sent his two friend back across the bridge into the city. Then, as the bridge collapsed, Horatius jumped into the river. Though he was wounded, he managed to swim across the Tiber and got back into the city of Rome. Supposedly the city was thus saved by the brave actions of these three men.

The passage before us this morning describes Paul and his two friends who are under attack by an advancing horde of Judaizers. Paul is fighting them off in defense of the true gospel. These Judaizers are Jewish people who claim to be followers of Jesus, but who want to add on conditions to the gospel. They are trying to tell the new Christians in the Roman province of Galatia in Asia Minor that it is not enough to believe in Jesus. In order to get to heaven, you have to become Jewish. You have to follow the rules of the Old Testament. These Judaizers seem to also be trying to undermine the Apostle Paul's authority, claiming perhaps that they have a closer tie to the first apostles and to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

So thus we have seen in this letter to the Galatians that Paul is explaining the gospel. He is emphasizing that the true story is one of grace. Salvation comes by faith in Jesus. Nothing more. He is also defending his authority, explaining that he was commissioned directly by the risen Christ, not by any other apostle or any other Christians.

Last time in the second part of Galatians #1 we saw Paul give his testimony, his story about how he became a follower of Jesus and how he was sent to bring the gospel to

Gentiles. Today we take up his story in #2 as Paul describes his early encounters with the first apostles and with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem.

I.

So in vv. 1-5 of #2 we find THE GOSPEL OF GRACE DEFENDED. (PROJECTOR ON-- - I. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE DEFENDED). Paul writes in v. 1, **“Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me.”** We saw last week in #1 that after Paul’s dramatic conversion on his trip to Damascus, he went into Arabia for three years. The specific country involved was Nabatea. We speculated that Paul may have used that initial time to restudy the Hebrew Bible and reinterpret it because of his encounter with Jesus. Perhaps during the latter part of that time he took up evangelism. For from 1 Corinthians #11 we learned that King of Aretas of Nabatea tried to capture Paul upon his return to Damascus. After that Paul made a brief trip to Jerusalem to meet Peter and James.

Now it is fourteen years later. Most scholars think that Paul is counting years from the time of his conversion. We are introduced to two other characters. I have referred to Barnabas earlier as Paul’s partner who went with him on the first missionary journey. Since Barnabas played a key role on that first trip and because he plays a part in the story now, it might be good to look at his history.

Barnabas first appears in the New Testament history book, Acts, in #4. (ACTS 4:36) In vv. 36 and 37 we are told, **“Thus Joseph, who was also called by the apostles Barnabas (which means son of encouragement), a Levite, a native of Cyprus, (ACTS 4:37) sold a field that belonged to him and brought the money and laid it at the apostles’ feet.”** So Barnabas was originally named Joseph. He was from the tribe of Levi. He came from Cyprus. Cyprus was the island that Paul and Barnabas visited on their first missionary trip. He was also an encourager. We always need people around who are good encouragers, don’t we?

So Barnabas was involved with the Christians in Jerusalem at an early time. He had some property. He was generous. He sold a piece of land and gave all the money to the apostles for them to use as needed. When Paul made his first brief trip to Jerusalem, the Christians were skeptical. They had known Paul as a persecutor of the church. They were afraid that Paul had ulterior motives in trying to get close to church leaders. Barnabas went out on a limb and took him under his wing. It was a good decision. A bit later Paul goes back to his hometown of Tarsus in Asia Minor.

As we learn from Acts #11, Jewish Christians from Cyprus start preaching in Antioch (FIRST MISSIONARY JOURNEY). Gentiles start believing the gospel. So the church in Jerusalem sends Barnabas to Antioch to help out. Barnabas sends for Paul in Tarsus to join him. They do church work together in Antioch. Then the two of them are sent out on this first missionary journey. The Christians in Galatia would thus have had first hand exposure to Barnabas as well as Paul.

(PROJECTOR OFF) We know a little less about this guy Titus. Paul later writes a letter to Titus, which is included in the New Testament. In #1 v. 4 of that short book Paul calls Titus “my true child in a common faith.” A reasonable assumption is that Titus became a Christian under Paul’s preaching in Antioch in Syria. As we shall see, he was a Gentile. So now Paul and Barnabas and Titus are going to Jerusalem..

The next thing that Bible teachers try to do is to fit this trip to Jerusalem into the New Testament history book of Acts. Most of these teachers tie this trip into Acts #11 vv. 27-30. (PROJECTOR ON--- ACTS 11:27) Beginning in v. 27 we read, **“Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. (ACTS 11:28) And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius). (ACTS 11:29) So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. (ACTS 11:30) And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul.”** This would seem to fit with verse 1 of Galatians #2. A key purpose for the visit was to provide financial help to Jewish Christians in Jerusalem who were dealing with a famine. (PROJECTOR OFF)

According to v. 2 of our passage Paul says, **“I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain.”** Perhaps the revelation had to do with the prophecy of this guy Agabus. Perhaps there was a direct revelation to Paul.

Paul then talks privately to the Jerusalem church leaders. He does not have doubts about the message he preaches. His concern is about unity between Jewish and Gentile Christians. My interpretation is that he is concerned that everyone is on board with the message that Gentiles and Jews can be right with God simply by trusting in Jesus.

He continues in v. 3: **“But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.”** This was the issue in the churches in Galatia. Do Gentile Christians have to become Jewish to be right with God? Do Gentile men have to be circumcised? Paul may have wanted Titus to come along with him to Jerusalem partly to force this issue. Are the church leaders in Jerusalem on the same page with Paul? They were. They saw no need for Titus to be circumcised. So these Judaizer characters trying to influence the Galatian Christians are wrong in their theology. The Jerusalem leaders support Paul and not them.

Verse 4: **“Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery—”** Apparently some of these Judaizers showed up at one of these meetings in Jerusalem. They tried to make their case before the Jerusalem leaders that Gentiles had to become Jewish to be right with God.

Notice here that Paul calls these guys “false brothers.” Apparently he does not regard them even as genuine Christians. They have some kind of belief in Jesus, but what is the real source of their security? Their faith is too much in their own Jewishness and their adherence to the Old Testament law.

This is still an issue today. How am I right with God? Do I have to believe in Jesus and follow the Old Testament law? Do I have to believe in Jesus and follow the rules laid down by Joseph Smith? Do I have to follow Jesus and also listen to the directions of Mary Baker Eddy? Do I have to follow Jesus and also listen to what Charles Taze Russell said? The result of adding things to the gospel, Paul says, is slavery. If our acceptance by God is dependent upon us living by rules, by living up to a standard of conduct, how do we ever know that we are good enough? We are at the mercy of whoever is laying down the rules.

What is the freedom which Paul is talking about in v. 4? It would seem to me that the Apostle is talking about freedom from trying to live up to the Old Testament law, it is freedom from bondage to sin, it is freedom from being controlled by the devil, it is freedom from fear of death. In #5 v. 3 of this book Paul will later say, **“I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law.”** That was, and is, a very difficult thing to do. Paul calls it “slavery.”

He continues in v. 5 of our passage, **“...to them [the Judaizers] we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you.”** Paul accepted the statement of Jesus that the second greatest commandment is to love one’s neighbor. But he was convinced that central to that admonition was telling the truth about the gospel. How can we love our neighbor if we are not telling the truth about how we can go to heaven? Paul’s message was that the gospel is that salvation comes from trusting in Jesus. Period.

There is much that I appreciate about the Catholic Church. Historically they have taught the truth about who Jesus was and is. They have supported the doctrine of the Trinity. They respect the Bible. They share most of our positions in the culture wars. They have taken a lead in supporting the pro-life cause. They are big on the sanctity of marriage. They support the traditional family. Of course, there have been horrible scandals involving the behavior of too many priests.

But then also there is the issue of the gospel. How is it that people go to heaven? In the middle of the 1500s (PROJECTOR ON--- COUNCIL OF TRENT) the Council of Trent met to determine the church’s position on key doctrines of the faith. In regard to the gospel it decreed, **“If anyone says that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in divine mercy which remits sin for Christ’s sake alone, let him be anathema.”** The church seems to be saying that faith alone in Jesus and his mercy is anathema. Everyone who believes that and teaches that should be cursed. The teaching of the Catholic Church has been you have to believe in Jesus and observe the sacraments. It is belief in Jesus plus certain works.

What does the Bible say? In Ephesians #2 vv. 8 & 9 (EPHESIANS 2:8-9) the Bible says, **“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”** This is what the Bible says in Romans #5 v. 1 (ROMANS 5:1): **“Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.”**

At times we evangelicals can also get it wrong. I have often heard Christians challenge unbelievers to make Jesus Lord of their life. In order to become Christians we have to recognize that Jesus is God, that He is Lord. But what do we mean by saying that we have to make Jesus Lord of our life? Do we have to give up sins? Which sins? All sins? Doesn't the Bible teach that Christians are still sinners? At one moment when we do something which shows that Jesus is not in charge, do we lose our eternal life? The gospel is: Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved. That is the exact wording which Paul used in Acts #16 v. 31.

II.

In vv. 6-9 of #2 we find THE GOSPEL OF GRACE AFFIRMED. (II. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE AFFIRMED) Paul says in v. 6, **“And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.”** The reference is to leaders of the Jerusalem church, which includes some of the twelve apostles plus James. These guys were respected by all of the Jerusalem Christians. The Judaizers claimed them as supporting their position. Paul is telling the Galatian Christians here that these leaders added nothing to him. In other words, they made no addition, correction, or subtraction to the message which he preached.

Verse 7: **“On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised...”** Apparently Peter was focused in his ministry on Jewish occupied areas. The New Testament does not give us details about his whereabouts after this meeting in Jerusalem.

The Jerusalem leaders at this meeting are getting a first hand report from Paul and Barnabas about their first missionary journey. This trip has resulted in the planting of several churches whose members are mostly Gentiles. The Jerusalem leaders recognize that God has been at work through the ministry of Paul and Barnabas.

So Paul continues his thought in v. 8: **“(for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles)...”** In this parenthetical thought Paul points to the results as evidence that the Holy Spirit has been at work in bringing people to Jesus. The Book of Acts includes within this divine working several stories of miracles performed at the hands of Paul and Peter. This includes at least one incident each where people were brought back from death.

The thing to notice is that Paul acknowledges that he and Peter have different focuses of ministry. That is a sign of maturity in the Christian church today. Local churches and Christian organizations have different kinds of ministry and outreach. We don't have to try to all compete at doing the same thing. Our church has had an emphasis on prison ministry. Other churches in our area have been good at planning missions trips. We have had free medical clinics. The Assembly of God church has had success in hosting a farmers' market. Calvary Chapel has developed an annual trip to the Holy Land.

Paul completes his thought in v. 9: **"...and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised."** Here the primary Jerusalem church leaders are identified. "Cephas" is the Aramaic name for Peter. Aramaic was the first language of the Jews who lived in Judea in the first century. It is very similar to Hebrew. It uses the same alphabet and has a similar grammar.

Also we have James the half-brother of Jesus. James the brother of John was one of the twelve apostles. That James was the first of the twelve to be killed for his faith. As the Book of Acts describes the early history of the church in Jerusalem, it becomes clear that James, the half-brother of Jesus, becomes the most prominent leader. The other apostles seem to have spread out through other parts of the world.

The John in v. 9 is the brother of the other James. This John and James were sons of Zebedee and among the twelve apostles. This John would become the author of the Gospel of John and the three letters of John in the New Testament and the Book of Revelation.

Some strains of Judaism taught that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the three pillars of Judaism. Perhaps these early Jewish Christians saw a parallel here in the leadership provided by Peter, James, and John.

Extending the right hand of fellowship was a traditional Jewish sign of unity and friendship. This tradition can be traced back to the Old Testament. For example (2 KINGS 10:15) in 2 Kings #10 v. 15 a guy named Jehu says, **"Is your heart true to my heart as mine is to yours?' And Jehonadab answered, 'It is.' Jehu said, 'If it is, give me your hand.'" So he gave him his hand. And Jehu took him up with him into the chariot."**

So in vv. 6-9 we see Paul speak about the appropriateness of having different focuses in ministry. (PROJECTOR OFF) But the key thing is the message of the gospel. Paul's message of the gospel of grace is affirmed by the leadership of the Jerusalem church. That same gospel message applies today. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

III.

Finally in v. 10 we see THE GOSPEL OF GRACE APPLIED TO THE POOR. (PROJECTOR ON--- III. THE GOSPEL OF GRACE APPLIED TO THE POOR) Paul's teaching is that nothing is to be added to the gospel. Our sins are forgiven and we receive eternal life simply by putting our trust in the Jesus of the Bible. That being said, our lives should be different because of that decision. We should want to follow the teachings of Jesus and of the New Testament. We should have a concern for loving others. One evidence of that is concern for the poor.

Thus Paul writes in v. 10: **"Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do."** We saw from our earlier reference to Acts #11 vv. 27-30 that a major reason for this trip to Jerusalem was that there was a famine in and around Jerusalem. The Christians in the Antioch church collected money to help out these Christians in the Jerusalem area. In doing that they were remembering the poor.

We try to follow that example and model in our church by maintaining a deacon's fund. We use this money primarily to help out people in our congregation who are having difficult financial stresses. Our deacons with input from our deaconesses administer that money. If you want to contribute toward that, just note on your check to the church deacons' fund. Or you can contribute cash by putting it in a slot on the podium out in the foyer. There is a little sign on that marked "Deacons' Fund."

Jesus said that the greatest commandment was to love God with all of our being. The second greatest commandment is to love our neighbors. Later in Galatians #6 v. 10 we will find that Paul refines that commandment. He says there, **"So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith."** We are not to ignore the needy world around us. But our financial resources are always limited. So we are to give priority to the needs of fellow Christians.

Christian people should have a concern for poor people in the world around us. It does not get much media attention these days. There is a natural tendency for the media to focus on tragedies and bad things. But there are good things happening in the world in terms of poor people. According to the *New York Times* (1/6/2018), before the pandemic five years ago, the number of people in the world living in poverty decreased by 217,000 every day. That is using UN standards. Also every day 325,000 more people were getting electricity, and 300,000 were gaining access to clean drinking water. That's great news.

When I was in high school a Stanford professor by the name of Paul Ehrlich was getting lots of press attention for predicting that there were going to be mass famines throughout the world in the following decade. It did not happen. Modern technology has contributed to great agricultural gains throughout the world.

Still there are poor people in the world around us. Christians should care. There is evidence on average that we do care. A guy named Arthur Brooks wrote a book a few years ago entitled *Who Really Cares?* He wrote, **"Not only do Christians devote more resources on fighting poverty than we do on morality and sanctity of life**

issues, Christians give far more to fight poverty than anyone else in the country.”

He cites statistics from ten years ago saying that 600 evangelical agencies were sending \$13 billion to global relief and development annually. Also they were spending \$9.2 billion annually on orphan care, relief work, and on medical, education, and other services for poor people around the world. (PROJECTOR OFF)

Paul’s main point in this passage, which he wants to make clear to the Galatians and to us, is that the gospel is a message of grace. If we believe in Jesus, our sins are forgiven. We are going to heaven. We are part of the family of God. We are truly Christians.

There are implications that come from that. We should be baptized to show to others that we have become Christians. We should be motivated to love God and to love other people. One practical demonstration of that is care for the poor. The priority is to be on fellow Christians. But we are to be concerned about poverty in the world around us. We are to be wise and strategic in how we spend that money. People standing on street corners asking for money too often will spend it on drugs and alcohol. Buying somebody a meal might be a better use of our money.

But let’s not confuse and muddle the gospel. The gospel is believe in Jesus and you will be saved.