

“Paul’s Credentials”
January 25, 2015
Galatians 2:1-10

I. Introduction

The best way to negate or discredit a message is to discredit the messenger, and that’s just what the false teachers, called Judaizers, tried to do. Shadowing the steps of Paul’s 1st missionary journey to the province of Galatia, these false teachers told the new Christians that Paul couldn’t be an Apostle—he had never been a disciple of Jesus and he had never seen the resurrected Jesus. They also said that Paul’s message was made up by him—he had made it up to get people to follow him. They said that Paul’s message was incomplete, as [Acts 15:1](#) says, “Some men came down from Judea ... and were teaching the brothers: ‘Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved.’” Needless to say, these two different messages were disturbing to the new Christians—so disturbing that some of the new Christians were leaving the Gospel to follow these false teachers who were preaching a mixture of Law and grace.

In the second half of Galatians 1, which we looked at last week, Paul showed through his testimony that he had seen the resurrected Jesus when He had appeared to Paul when he was on the way to Damascus to arrest Christians. Paul also testified that he had been personally taught by Jesus for almost 3 years while he stayed in the Arabia. Paul, like the 12 Apostles, had been taught by Jesus; he had seen the risen Jesus; and Paul said in [Acts 22:21](#) that Jesus had told him personally to “Go, I will send you far away to the Gentiles;” therefore, by Jesus’ choice, Paul was an Apostle of Jesus Christ. In today’s Scripture, Paul continues to defend his authority and his message as he tells about his trip to Jerusalem. [Turn to Galatians 2:1-10](#). Paul went to Jerusalem to prove that the gospel he preached was identical to that preached by the other apostles. He didn’t need to go confirm his Apostleship for himself but for the Galatian believers who were being confused and deceived by the Judaizers. [Acts 15](#) seems to record this same visit—[turn to Acts 15:1-21](#).

II. The Visit to Jerusalem

A. The Private Meeting Turning back to Galatians, it seems that this visit to Jerusalem can be divided into 3 events beginning with the private meeting. This wasn’t Paul’s first trip to Jerusalem. As we saw last week, soon after his conversion, Paul had met with Peter for 15 days in Jerusalem and had met James, Jesus’ half brother, during that same time. [Acts 11:27-30; 12:24-25](#) records that Paul went to Jerusalem a 2nd time but that was just to help Barnabas take a collection to Jerusalem from the church at Antioch. This collection was for relief of famine-stricken believers in Judea. But what was done and said

then didn't have any significance to the issue of Paul's apostleship or Paul's message. It wasn't until fourteen more years had passed that Paul and Barnabas returned again to Jerusalem.

It all happened after Paul and Barnabas had returned to Antioch from their first missionary journey to Galatia. [Acts 14:27](#) says that “On arriving there, i.e. Antioch, they gathered the church together and reported all that God had done through them and how he had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles.” As we just read from [Acts 15](#), Jewish legalists in Judea were upset when they heard the report; so they went to Antioch and taught that basically a Gentile had to become a Jew before he could become a Christian.

God had established circumcision in the days of Abraham. Submitting to circumcision meant accepting and obeying the entire Jewish Law. But like a lot of things that begin with a spiritual meaning, like baptism or communion in some churches, it had been turned into a mere ritual. [Turn to Romans 2:28-29](#). The true Christian has experienced an inner circumcision of the heart and doesn't need to submit to any physical operation. Paul wrote in [Philippians 3:3](#), “For it is we who are the circumcision, we who worship by the Spirit of God, who glory in Christ Jesus, and who put no confidence in the flesh.”

When Paul and Barnabas confronted these false teachers with the truth of the Gospel, [Acts 15:2](#) says that there was a “sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.” It was decided that the best place to settle the question was before the church leaders in Jerusalem.

In addition to Paul and Barnabas, Paul's fellow missionary and companion, there was Titus who was an uncircumcised Gentile believer who had been won to Christ through Paul's ministry and then had worked with Paul. Titus was a product of the very ministry the Judaizers were railing against. When this delegation from Antioch arrived in Jerusalem, some of them, including Paul, met privately with the church leaders. Notice that Paul went to Jerusalem “in response to a revelation”—that is, the Lord told him to go.

Perhaps Paul wanted to get the leaders' approval before he faced the whole assembly; otherwise a three-way division might result. [Verse 6](#) gives the result: “As for those who seemed to be important-- whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance-- those men added nothing to my message.” They added nothing to the Gospel Paul was preaching; therefore the Judaizers were wrong.

Paul respected these leaders or he wouldn't have met with them privately nor would he have looked for their public confirmation so that people would know he was not running in vain. Paul's referring to them in this sarcastic way as “those who seemed to be leaders” and as “those who seemed to

be important” was directed at the Judaizers who had been claiming approval from the council for their false teachings—but really didn’t have support from the leaders or those who were important. In Acts 15:24 the church council described these Judaizers as “some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said.” These are the same Judaizers that said that Paul was not a leader or important.

B. The Public Meeting After this private meeting there came the public meeting. In Galatians 2:3-5 Paul quickly covered the historical account of the Council of Jerusalem that we read in Acts 15:6-21. Several witnesses presented the case for the Gospel of the grace of God, including Peter. As you may remember, it was in Acts 10 that Peter had been directed by God to take the Gospel to the Gentiles—in particular, to Cornelius the centurion and his house. Peter reminded those gathered there that God gave the Holy Spirit to the believing Gentiles just as He had done to the Jews, he said in Acts 15:9, “He, i.e. God, made no distinction between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith.” Peter made it clear that there is one way of salvation: faith in Jesus Christ.

Paul and Barnabas then told the assembly what God had done among the Gentiles. Reliving the tensions of that meeting, Paul’s grammar and sentence structure fell apart in this part of Galatians. The “false brothers” who were there must have debated with Paul and Barnabas, but they wouldn’t be swayed—Paul wrote “We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.”

It would seem that Titus was exhibit A. Paul brought Titus to confound the “false brothers who had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves.” Titus was a Gentile Christian who had never submitted to circumcision. If the Judaizers were right, then Titus was not a saved man. But it was obviously clear to all that he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Titus was a saved man in whom the Holy Spirit dwelt, therefore the Judaizers were wrong. To have circumcised Titus would have indicated that he was missing something in his Christian experience. To have circumcised him would have been cowardice and compromise. It is impossible to be a legalist and a Christian. Turn to Galatians 5:2-4. To do a single thing to earn salvation is to negate grace.

James, the leader of the church, gave the summation of the arguments and the conclusion of the matter in Acts 15:13-21. As Jewish as he was, he made it clear that a Gentile does not have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. Jews and Gentiles are saved the same way—through faith in Jesus Christ. James finished by asking that the assembly counsel the Gentiles not to do anything that would offend unbelieving Jews. Paul and his message were vindicated.

C. Paul's Commission Reaffirmed Not only did the assembly approve Paul's Gospel and oppose Paul's enemies, but they reaffirmed Paul's commission from God. This was the 3rd event: Paul's commission reaffirmed. They recognized publically that God had committed the Gentile ministry into Paul's capable hands. They could add nothing to Paul's message or ministry and they dared not take anything away.

To demonstrate the unity in doctrine as well as personal unity, Paul wrote that they “**gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship.**” The “**pillars**” at Jerusalem recognized Paul not only as a true preacher and teacher of the gospel but also as a beloved partner with them in Christ's service. They had different areas of service—Paul and Barnabas ministered primarily to the Gentiles and the Jerusalem leaders ministered primarily to the Jews—but they proclaimed the same Gospel and served the same Lord in the power of His Spirit. Paul's Apostleship to the Gentiles was equal to Peter's Apostleship to the Jews.

The only request made of Paul and Barnabas was that they “**remember the poor.**” The request was a practical request as well as doctrinal. It emphasized the special needs of believers in Judea. Many had little money and they soon discovered that because they were Christians, it was often difficult to find any employment. In the beginning of the Christian church in Jerusalem, those who had money or other possessions generously shared what they had, but resources were rapidly depleted as the number of Christians grew. To take care of the poor is not only a practical but a spiritual responsibility—to forsake that responsibility is to disobey God's Word—1 John 3:17 says, “**If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?**”

III. Conclusion

We need to mimic the courageous stand Paul and Barnabas and Titus made for the liberty of the Gospel. Paul's concern was for “**the truth of the Gospel**” (Galatians 2:5, 14), not the “*peace of the church.*” James 3:17 says, “**The wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving.**” “*Peace at any price*” was not Paul's philosophy and it should not be ours either. We need to be immovable when it comes to God and His Word.

Every since the beginning of the Gospel, the enemies of grace have been trying to add something to the grace of God. Peter said in Acts 15:11 that “**We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved.**” BUT modern-day Judaizers tell us that a man is saved by faith in Christ plus something—good works, the Ten Commandments, baptism, communion, church membership, religious ritual, something special—Paul and Peter made it clear that such teachings are wrong. Paul pronounced a

curse on any person or angel who preaches any other gospel than the Gospel of the grace of God through Jesus Christ. We need to stand for the liberty of the Gospel.

Freedom is often mentioned in the New Testament. We are free from all these “works.” In **John 8:36** Jesus said, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.” In **2 Corinthians 3:17** Paul wrote, “Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.” However, Christian freedom or liberty is not license to do anything we want. When we become free in Christ, we gain our freedom from sin, of which we were once slaves. **Romans 6:18** says, “You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.” Paul wrote in **Galatians 5:13**, “You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love.” We are saved only by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. The good works that follow come because of the love that we have for our Lord and our Savior. The James from Acts 15 wrote in **James 2:18**, “But someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do.”

So what about you? On what to you base your salvation? Being a good person? Then let me ask you, “Do you know the Ten Commandments?” Have you ever lied?” What does that make you? Have you ever taken anything that didn’t belong to you? **Romans 3:12** says, “There is no one who does good, not even one.” Later, **Romans 6:23** says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” One doesn’t earn a “gift.” As Paul and Peter and James said, salvation is through grace—it’s a gift of God. Works have nothing to do with salvation. Do you use your freedoms for good or for bad? Do you serve God because you are deathly afraid of Him or what He can do to you? Or do you serve God because you love Him—as Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 5:14**, “For Christ’s love compels us.” Or as **Psalms 100:2** says, “Serve the Lord with gladness,”