

Study 3: Galatians Chapter 2

Introduction

Paul continues the first 1/3 of the letter, dealing with the issue of his apostleship. He further introduces some of the core thoughts that he will build on in the next two chapters – ideas that are key to the Galatian letter that justification comes from faith in Christ, and not by keeping of the Law of Moses.

Body of the Study

Paul talks about the visit to Jerusalem – what was the occasion?

How did Paul relate to the other apostles on this visit?

What about the dispute between Peter and Paul?

What was Paul's specific condemnation of Peter?

What are the implications of Peter's actions?

What is Paul's final argument in vs 18-21?

Homework and preparation for next week:

- *How has Paul argued his case for his credibility?*
- *Gal 2:20 perhaps sums up Paul's life. What thoughts might sum up your life?*
- Read the notes as a review of the study.
- Read chapters 3 & 4 together in preparation for the next study.

Notes for study 3: Chapter 2

Introduction

Paul continues with the first 1/3 of the letter, dealing with the issue of his apostleship. He has already shown that “*his gospel*” was achieved independently of the apostles in Jerusalem. He now shows that it was also fully endorsed by them.

Body of the Study

Paul talks about the visit to Jerusalem – what was the occasion?

Paul describes this visit as being 14 years after his conversion. This places the visit at AD 51, and is the visit that Paul made that is described in Acts chapter 15. The occasion of this visit was in fact to address the very issue of the requirement for Gentile Christians to keep the Law of Moses – the very same issue that has now arisen amongst the Galatians.

Paul had not too long ago returned from the first journey – the mission to the Galatians – and his work amongst the Gentiles had reached the ears of some of the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Some of the Jews came (falsely) teaching “...that the apostles in Jerusalem said...that the Gentiles have to keep the Law of Moses...” (Acts 15:24).

When Paul went to Jerusalem, he reported to the elders and the apostles all that God had done amongst the Gentiles through him (Acts 15:4) – and clearly what Paul taught. He found that there was no discrepancy between the things that Paul taught, and the things that the rest of the apostles taught (Acts 15:25 – they were of “one accord”). Paul reinforces this in Gal 2.

When Paul went to Jerusalem, he took Titus – who was a Greek with him. The fact that the apostles in Jerusalem did not require Titus to be circumcised (2:3) proves the point that circumcision – and keeping the Law of Moses – is not required by Gentile Christians. A fuller discussion of circumcision (and why Paul circumcised Timothy but steadfastly refused to circumcise Titus) can be found in Study 22 of my Studies in the book of Acts.

How did Paul relate to the other apostles on this visit?

Paul initially approached them privately (2:2) so that they would not undermine the things that he was to say and do. This is an entirely appropriate way to approach the issue. When Paul later stood before the elders and the apostles (and “*multitudes*” of the brethren being there also – Acts 15:12) there would be no surprise in the things that Paul was to say, and no dispute between Paul and Barnabas and the rest of the apostles.

Lest it be thought that the apostles in Jerusalem were the “*real apostles*” and Paul was only a Johnny-come-lately, Paul says that they “...added nothing to him...” (2:6). Paul seems to address the apostles in a scornful way three times in the chapter (2:2, 6, 9). But we need to remember that Paul is not in dispute with the apostles, but rather with the Judaizers who had “*name dropped*” the apostles as siding with them. Paul’s response is to the brethren who have been swayed by the Judaizers – they were thinking “we are right, because we have the real apostles on **our** side”. Paul responds to this that “if the real apostles are teaching that – then they are just as wrong as you are! and they are showing themselves to be nothing, even though they are perceived as pillars.”

In fact, there was no dispute between Paul and the other apostles. And rather than siding with the Judaizers, they sided with Paul and Barnabas. Paul and Barnabas outlined the work that God had done through them amongst the Gentiles. Peter outlined how that it was through him that the

Gentiles were initially converted. James chaired the meeting and summed up that “...*the Gentiles who became Christians should not be troubled by the Jews in being made to conform to Jewish traditions...*” (Acts 15:19), “...*and the right hand of fellowship was extended to Paul and Barnabas...*” (2:9)

The end result of the Jerusalem conference was the recognition that Paul had been called to a mission amongst the Gentiles (Acts 9:15; Gal 2:7) just as the Peter had been called to a mission amongst the Jews (2:7,8).

What about the dispute between Peter and Paul?

This must have been around the time of the Jerusalem conference, and during the time that Paul was working with the church in Antioch. There was a period of around 2 or 3 years after the first journey that Paul was in Antioch before the Jerusalem conference, and a period of a few months after the conference before the second journey. If the confrontation had occurred in the first period, then it could be argued as being relevant to the case under discussion – that Peter had come to Antioch and been in dispute about their teaching. Paul has made a strong argument that he had only had very scant contact with the apostles before the Jerusalem conference, and at that conference there was no disagreement.

So, this places the visit of Peter to Antioch after the Jerusalem conference – and probably before the start of the second journey. We have no record of the visit other than that described here, but there are limited opportunities, as it had to be at a time when Paul was in Antioch.

Paul is showing that he was not only equal to Peter, but at times was also his superior. We need to be careful to point out here that what Paul was condemning in Peter was not his teaching, but his behaviour – he was being hypocritical.

Peter must have come down and spent some time in Antioch with Paul, and whilst he was there he was quite happy to mix and eat with the Gentiles (2:12). However, some brethren came down from Jerusalem, and at that time Peter stopped eating with the Gentiles and behaved as a traditional Jew would have towards the Gentile brethren. Peter should have known better. It was he who received the vision about clean and unclean meat, and he knew what the implications were because of his personal associations with Cornelius. He had presented this case at the Jerusalem conference not too long before (Acts 15:7-11).

Peter was afraid of what the Jewish brethren might think, even though he knew what was right (2:12). It appears that the Jewish brethren were very strong in keeping the Jewish traditions of not having social interaction with the Gentiles – even the Gentile Christians. The natural outcome of such a withdrawal would be that the Jews could not even have the Lord’s supper with the Gentiles. There is nothing wrong with keeping of the national traditions (for a fuller discussion of this, refer to Study 22 of my Study series in the Book of Acts). The Jewish brethren were so strong and adamant about keeping the traditions “...*that even Barnabas was carried away with their hypocrisy...*” (2:13)

Paul rightly stood up to Peter for his hypocrisy. Paul was quite happy to mix with the Gentile brethren, but then because of *some perceived thought of condemnation* he refused to continue the fellowship that he had started. This is even more apparent if we understand that Peter was now refusing to participate in the Lord’s Supper with the Gentile brethren. Paul was quite open in his condemnation of Peter’s behaviour.

What was Paul's specific condemnation of Peter?

Peter was a Jew, and when he had come to Antioch he was quite happy (and quite right) to mix with and have fellowship with the Gentile brethren. But then along came the Jewish brethren who were strict Jews. Peter then withdraw from the Gentiles, and only mixed with the Jews. The problem was that that left the Gentile brethren out on a limb. How could they have fellowship with the Jewish brethren? The only thing that they could do was to become Jews so that they could have fellowship! By his actions and examples, Peter was requiring that the Gentiles take on the Jewish culture and traditions.

Paul says “...if you being a Jew live as the Gentiles do, then why do you require the Gentiles to live as the Jews do?” (2:14)

What are the implications of Peter's actions?

This really comes to the core of the issue, and to the core of the letter to the Galatians. Paul is showing here the consistency of what he teaches and practices. Not only is he consistent in his teaching and practice when he was with the Galatians, he is also unchanged in his current teaching and practice. But even more to the point, he is exactly consistent with the dispute that he had with Peter in Antioch.

Paul's argument is of our *spiritual* nature, not our *physical* nature. Paul will make more of this later in the letter. *We are Jews by nature*. Christianity is the fulfilment of the Jewish religion. As christians we have a relationship with God because of our faith – just like Abraham had a relationship with God because of his faith. Our relationship with God comes through our faith whether we are of the Jewish nation, or whether we are Gentiles. When we become christians, we can only do that by taking on that faithful relationship – which is a form of the relationship that God had with the Jewish people. On the other hand, the Gentiles did not have such a relationship with God, and were living in sin.

So, with christianity replacing the Jewish religion, and that relationship being expressed by faith, then it is of no use at all to try bind the Jewish traditions onto the Gentiles. By keeping the law cannot make us right in the sight of God, so there is absolutely no point in keeping it – or at least trying to keep it – because no-one except Jesus was able to keep it perfectly.

What is Paul's final argument in vs 18-21?

One possibility is to do exactly as the Judaisers were wanting, and bind the Law of Moses onto all christians. But where would that lead to? Paul had turned away from his zealous keeping of the Jewish religion, and turned to christianity. Why would he want to go back to keeping the Law again?

Paul clearly makes the argument with one of the classic verses in all of the New Testament:

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (2:20 NIV)

Paul had devoted his life for the cause of Christ, and had put to death his old life (as a Jew). To go back and seek righteousness through the Jewish religion is to make the sacrifice of Christ of no effect. If righteousness comes through the Law (of Moses), then there was no need at all for Christ to die, and so His death was for nothing. Paul will expand on this over the next two chapters.