

Galatians Chapter 2

Verses 1-21: The argument (in 1:11-24), was that Paul's gospel is divine in its origin. The argument (in 2:1-21), is that his gospel is divine in nature. This is proved in two ways:

- (1) The Pauline gospel was acknowledged by the apostles to be authentic (verses 1-10);
- (2) Paul's rebuke of Peter for his reinstating the law attests the authenticity of the Pauline gospel (verses 11-21).

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

"Fourteen years ... again to Jerusalem": This was the period from the time of his first visit to Jerusalem (1:18), to the one Paul refers to here, which probably was for the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-22), called to resolve the issue of Gentile salvation. Linguistically, the word "again" need not refer to the next visit; it can just as easily mean "once again", without respect to how many visits took place in between.

And in fact, Paul did visit Jerusalem during that 14-year period to deliver famine relief to the church there (Acts 11:27-30; 12:24-25), but he does not refer to that visit here since it had no bearing on his apostolic authority.

"Barnabas" (see note on Acts 4:36). Paul's first ally who vouched for him before the apostles at Jerusalem (Acts 9:27), and became his traveling companion on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:2-3).

"Titus": A spiritual child of Paul and a coworker (Titus 1:4-5). As an uncircumcised Gentile, Titus was fitting proof of the effectiveness of Paul's ministry.

Paul's second trip to Jerusalem came 14 years after his first visit when he had met Peter (1:18). Two important figures accompanied him on this occasion, "Barnabas" and "Titus".

It really does not matter whether these 14 years is from the time of Paul's conversion to Christianity, or that it is from the time he met with Peter. I believe in the first chapter, Paul was showing that his training was not of man, but God. In this chapter, however, we will see that Paul has ministered with the approval of the apostles who were part of the twelve.

This does not even mean that this is the second visit that Paul has made. It more probably means another time, not the second time. We know that Paul had been involved in ministry for many years at this point.

We will find in Paul's journeys that several ministers traveled with him. He really had a large following everywhere he went. The reason he mentions the 14 years here, is possibly to show the success of his ministry. He was so believed, that men and women followed along with his group and helped him minister.

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

“Went up by revelation”: This revelation from God was the voice of the Holy Spirit (see notes on Acts 13:2-4). He refers to the divine commissioning of his visit in order to refute any suggestion by the Judaizers that they had sent Paul to Jerusalem to have the apostles correct his doctrine.

“Gospel” (see note on 1:7).

“Them which were of reputation”: The 3 main leaders of the Jerusalem church: Peter, James (the Lord’s brother, 1:19), and John (verse 9). This phrase was typically used of authorities and implied a position of honor.

Paul refers to them in a similar way two other times (verses 6, 9), suggesting a hint of sarcasm directed toward the Judaizers, who claimed they had apostolic approval for their doctrine and Paul did not. They had likely made a habit of exalting these 3 leaders at the expense of Paul.

“Run ... in vain”: Paul hoped the Jerusalem leaders would support his ministry to the Gentiles and not soften their opposition to legalism. He did not want to see his ministry efforts wasted because of conflict with the other apostles.

The reason for this second trip was “by” [because of] “revelation;” that is, by prompting him to go; God foresaw the necessity for this consultation with the apostles. In Jerusalem, Paul “communicated” (laid before) his gospel to the apostles. The Greek word rendered “communicated” means “to refer something to another party for his opinion of it.”

So Paul “privately” sought the judgment of “them which were of reputation” (the Jerusalem apostles), regarding the gospel he had been proclaiming for 14 years. Why did Paul seek the apostles’ opinion? He had no doubt as to the validity of his gospel, for he had received it directly from Christ; so his consultation with John, James and Peter was not to ascertain whether his gospel was correct.

Rather it was to obtain their approval of the way he was bringing Gentiles into the church: they were admitted without circumcision on the basis of their faith in Christ. Apart from the apostles’ consent, Paul’s ministry among the heathen would be hindered, he would “run” [labor] ... “in vain.”

It appears from this, that Paul had preached what the Spirit had taught him, and now he was coming to see Peter, James, and the others in authority to tell them what he had preached. The message, that Paul gave here, was not for everyone, but for those in authority, for their approval.

Paul had been ministering this message for over 11 years. He now wanted the others to approve his ministry. The fact that he "went up by revelation" means that God sent him. He had never questioned the message before, but since he was sent by the Spirit, he felt he now needed Peter and James' approval.

Verses 3-9: These verses reveal the outcome of Paul's submission of his gospel to the apostles for their opinion. That they acknowledged his gospel to be genuine and to be the same gospel they preached is seen in three ways;

- (1) Circumcision was not required of the uncircumcised Titus (verse 3). Had Paul's gospel been lacking in this respect, Titus would have been circumcised.
- (2) The Jerusalem apostles ("they who seemed to be somewhat in conference") "added nothing to me" (verse 6), that is, they found nothing lacking in his gospel so as to require the addition of something (e.g., circumcision).
- (3) The apostles "gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship: (verse 9). In antiquity the giving of the right hand was a sign of agreement made between peers. The Jerusalem apostles viewed Paul and Barnabas as partners in the gospel ministry. The apostles would never had done this had they looked upon Paul's gospel as erroneous.

Galatians 2:3 "But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:"

"Greek" (see note on Romans 1:14).

"Compelled to be circumcised": At the core of the Judaizers' works system was the Mosaic prescription of circumcision (see notes on Gen. 17:9-14; Rom. 4:9-12). They were teaching that there could be no salvation without circumcision (Acts 15:1, 5, 24). Paul and the apostles denied that and it was settled at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-22).

See (notes on 5:2-12; 6:15; Rom. 4:10-12; 1 Cor. 7:19). As a true believer, Titus was living proof that circumcision and the Mosaic regulations were not prerequisites or necessary components of salvation. The apostles' refusal to require Titus' circumcision verified the church's rejection of the Judaizers' doctrine (Acts 16:1-3).

The doctrine of circumcision and of sacrificing has sprung up in the church. The Judaizers have insisted that the Christians go back to keeping the Jewish law. These people had forced Titus to be circumcised before they would accept him, because he was a Greek.

In fact, not many years after this very happening is when the temple was destroyed. Either Jesus did it all on the cross for us, or we worship Him in vain. Jesus was the perfect sacrifice for all time for everyone. To sacrifice after this would be to say that Jesus was not the perfect Lamb of God. Paul wants to get this question settled.

Galatians 2:4 "And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:"

"False brethren": The Judaizers, who pretended to be true Christians. Yet, their doctrine, because it claimed allegiance to Christ, was opposed to traditional Judaism, and because it demanded

circumcision and obedience to the Mosaic Law as prerequisites for salvation, was opposed to Christianity.

“To spy out”: This Greek word pictures spies or traitors entering by stealth into an enemy’s camp. The Judaizers were Satan’s undercover agents sent into the midst of the church to sabotage the true gospel.

“Liberty”: Christians are free from the law as a means of salvation, from its external ceremonial regulations as a way of living, and from its curse for disobedience to the law, a curse that Christ bore for all believers (3:13). This freedom is not, however, a license to sin (5:13; Rom. 6:18; 1 Pet. 2:16).

“Bondage”: Conveys the idea of absolute slavery to an impossible system of works righteousness.

“Unawares brought in” means “smuggled in.” these “false brethren” tried to get Titus circumcised (verse 3). These unbelievers “came in privily” (sneaked in), or infiltrated Christian churches. Their purpose was to “spy out” and carefully examine the believers’ “liberty”, or freedom from the Mosaic Law.

The ultimate aim of this spying was to “bring” the Christians “into bondage” by tying them up with all the rules and regulations of Judaism.

Notice in this verse, that Paul says these people were pretending to be believers in Christ. They were really troublemakers to try to break up the Christian movement. Many Jews were converted to Christianity, so it was hard to determine sometimes who was really converted, and who was there to try to put them back under the law.

Galatians 2:5 "To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

“We gave place”: Paul and Titus (verse 3), never budged from their position of salvation by grace alone through faith alone.

“Truth of the gospel”: The true gospel as opposed to the different (1:6-8), and false one propagated by the Judaizers (see note on Rom. 1:1).

Paul refused to submit to the Judaizers’ demands of imposing the law on Christians. To have done so would have corrupted the pure truth of the gospel.

Since Paul had founded these churches with belief in Christ, he felt responsible to keep them in the faith. He would not even give these false brethren any time to bring their law to the people. He did not want his people confused by allowing them to hear false messages.

Colossians 2:8 "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ."

Colossians 2:4 "And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words."

Galatians 2:6 "But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed [to be somewhat] in conference added nothing to me:"

“These who seemed to be somewhat”: Another reference to Peter, James and John (see note on verse 2).

“Accepteth no man’s person”: The unique privileges of the 12 did not make their apostleship more legitimate or authoritative than Paul’s, Christ commissioned them all (Rom. 2:11). Paul never saw himself as apostolically inferior (see 2 Cor. 12:11-12).

These troublemakers that had come into the church had intended to put them back under the law. These brand new Christians were impressed with the authority with which they had spoken, even if they were not bringing the good news of the gospel. They were tender believers and must be carefully guarded from false teachings.

Paul says it really does not matter that they are supposed to be someone special. Probably they were Pharisees, who thought they were better than other men. God is no respecter of persons. All of their education meant nothing to God. Paul had been taught of God. God's teaching was much above the teaching of man.

Galatians 2:7 "But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as [the gospel] of the circumcision [was] unto Peter;"

The Judaizers claimed Paul was preaching a deviant gospel, but the apostles confirmed that he proclaimed the true gospel. It was the same gospel Peter proclaimed, but to a different audience.

“Of the uncircumcision”: Paul preached the gospel primarily to the Gentiles (also to Jews in Gentile lands), as his pattern was to go to the synagogue first (Acts 13:5).

“Gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter”: Peter’s ministry was primarily to the Jews.

“The gospel of the uncircumcision:” the apostles perceived that Paul had been divinely entrusted with the gospel to Gentiles, while Peter was entrusted with the gospel to Jews. They had been entrusted with the very same gospel, but sent to two different peoples.

We know that Paul had been sent to the Gentiles. It was the Jew who practiced circumcision.

Acts 13:47 "For so hath the Lord commanded us, [saying], I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth."

The Jews had thought themselves to be the only family that God wanted. They thought themselves to be better than others. Paul had been specifically sent to the Gentiles. It was Peter, however, who had been present when the Holy Ghost descended on the uncircumcised Gentiles.

Acts 10:45 "And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost."

God had shown Peter that the Gentiles were acceptable to God, even though they had never been circumcised. We see a direct statement in the next Scripture about Paul being called to the Gentiles.

Romans 15:16 "That I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost."

Galatians 2:8 "(For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)"

“He that wrought effectually in Peter ... in me”: The Holy Spirit, who has but one gospel, empowered both Peter and Paul in their ministries.

I see in this, that Paul is recognizing the ministry of Peter. He is just explaining that his call and Peter's call of God is to two different people. This does not mean that Paul never spoke to the Jewish converts, nor does it mean that Peter never spoke to the Gentiles. It does mean, that the main focus of their ministry was Paul to the Gentiles and Peter to the Jews.

Let us look at the commission Jesus gave to Paul in the following verses.

Acts 26:17-18 "Delivering thee from the people, and [from] the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee," "To open their eyes, [and] to turn [them] from darkness to light, and [from] the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me."

Galatians 2:9 "And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we [should go] unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision."

“Grace ... given unto me”: The only conclusion these leaders could make was that God’s grace was responsible for the powerful preaching of the gospel and the building of the church through Paul’s efforts.

“James, Cephas and John”: This James was Jesus’ half-brother (1:19), who had risen to a prominent role in the Jerusalem church. Cephas (Peter) and John (the brother of James the apostle, martyred in Acts 12:2), were two of Christ’s closest companions and became the main apostle in the Jerusalem church (see Acts chapters 2-12).

Pillars”: Emphasizing the role of James, Peter and John in establishing and supporting the church.

“Barnabas” (see notes on verse 1; Acts 4:36).

“The right hands of fellowship”: In the Near East, this represented a solemn vow of friendship and a mark of partnership. This act signified the apostle’s recognition of Paul as a teacher of the true gospel and a partner in ministry.

We should go unto the heathen”: Further confirmation of Paul’s divine call to ministry and a blow to the Judaizers, since the apostles directed him to continue in his already flourishing ministry to the gentiles.

“Circumcision” (see note on verse 7).

Now, we see three of the real pillars of the church approving the ministry of Paul. The right hand signifies the spiritual blessing. Of course Cephas, in the verse above, is the same as Peter. Peter, James (the half-brother of Jesus), and John blessed Paul and Barnabas in their endeavor to reach the Gentile world for Christ.

Peter actually was over all of the churches, whether they were made up of Jew or Gentile. His preaching, however, was focused on the Jew. James was head of the church at Jerusalem. John is the same as John the Revelator.

Galatians 2:10 "Only [they would] that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do."

“Remember the poor”: A practical reminder for Paul and the growing ranks of Gentile Christians. The number of Christians in Jerusalem grew rapidly at first (Acts 2:41-45; 6:1), and many who were visiting the city for the feast of Pentecost (Acts 2:1, 5), remained and never returned to their homes.

While the believers initially shared their resources (Acts 2:45; 4:32-37), many had little money. For years the Jerusalem church was economically pressed (see note on Acts 11:28).

The one request the apostles made of Paul was that he would “remember” [help], “the poor”. Paul willingly complied, saying that he “was forward” [zealous], “to do” so.

Even though their ministries were to a different people, they were all to remember the poor. Paul did not need instruction in this; he had been doing that very thing from the very beginning. It seems the believers in Jerusalem had been poverty stricken, and Paul had brought the message of charity to the Gentile churches.

He explains to them in the following verses that they are to help their converted Jewish brothers.

Romans 15:25-27 "But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints." "For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem." "It hath pleased them verily; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things."

The church in Jerusalem was made up of mainly Jews who had converted to Christianity.

Galatians Chapter 2 Questions

1. How many years had passed before Paul took Barnabus and Titus with him to Jerusalem?
2. How does this chapter differ from chapter 1?
3. Why do you suppose that Paul mentioned the 14 years?
4. Paul went up by _____?
5. What is meant by this statement?
6. Who did Paul bring this message to?
7. Why did Paul feel that he needed Peter and James' approval at this time?
8. What had they compelled Titus to do?
9. What two things, that the Jews had brought, has sprung up in the church?
10. What had the Judaizers insisted upon?
11. Why does the author believe God allowed the temple to be destroyed?
12. What does the statement "went up by revelation" show us?
13. To sacrifice after the resurrection of Jesus was saying what?
14. Why had the false brethren come in?
15. Why was it difficult to know those who had come to make trouble?
16. Why did Paul feel responsible for the Christians?
17. What does Colossians chapter 2 verse 8 warn them to beware of?
18. What was the difference in Peter's ministry and Paul's?
19. Where do we find the commission, Jesus gave to Paul?
20. Who gave Paul and Barnabus the right hand of fellowship?
21. What does the right hand signify?
22. Who was this James?
23. Why were the Gentile believers to remember the poor Jews?