

Galatians 2:1-14**June 21, 2020**

- 1) This passage continues the autobiographical material of chapter 1 by telling about an important conference of Paul, Peter, John, and James the brother of Jesus. Of all the meetings in the history of the church, I think this conference might have been the most important of all. The meeting occurred during the 2nd visit Paul made to Jerusalem following his conversion. The story of this conference is also recounted in Acts 15. Charles Cousar talks about the pivotal importance of this crucial event when he explains “how a small group of Jewish followers in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus’s resurrection came to be a predominantly Gentile movement at the end of the century with congregations scattered around the Mediterranean world.” Paul’s purpose in telling this story, which he relates in detail, is to further his argument from chapter 1 that his call and conversion came directly from Jesus Christ. Concerning the Jerusalem apostles, he says in verse 6 that they “added nothing to me.” However, he goes on to say that they gave his ministry their affirmation and blessing. Paul’s overriding concern in going to Jerusalem is not so much seeking for a validation of his authority, as much as it is to protect and promote the unity of the young Christian movement.

- 2) Galatians 2:1-2 – The Reason for the Trip to Jerusalem
 - a) Barnabas and Titus – Paul was not unaccompanied on his missionary journeys as confirmed by the book of Acts. Barnabas was based in the city of Antioch and the Christian community there was probably the sponsor of this early evangelistic effort. As an uncircumcised Greek, Titus would serve as the prime example of Paul’s case before the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem.

 - b) The Greek verb in verse 2 that is translated “laid before” is a much more formal and technical term than the word “visit” in 1:18, which Paul used to describe his earlier more casual visit to Jerusalem. “Laid before” could be understood to mean an explanation given or a consultation held with a recognized authority. This is not an informal visit, but a meeting with a vitally important agenda.

c) Paul traveled to Jerusalem along with Barnabas and Titus, not because he was summoned by the “acknowledged pillars,” of the church, but “in response to a revelation.” He states in verse 2 that he felt it necessary to describe his Gentile focused mission enterprise, “in order to make sure that I was not running, or had not run, in vain.” At 1st glance it appears that Paul was recognizing the higher authority of the Jerusalem apostles and seeking their approval of his mission activity. But that interpretation of Paul’s visit contradicts what he had just said in 1:11-12, where he insisted his authority was not derived from any human source. Instead of seeking Jerusalem’s form of a “Good Housekeeping Seal of Approval,” it is much more likely that Paul’s concern is for the unity of the church. If Paul and the Jerusalem leaders could not come to an agreement, it is likely that the early Christian community would have been rent asunder forming two competing ethnic cults. Cousar explains, “The view evidently prevailed among the predominantly Jewish elements of the church that the task of mission was 1st Israel and only after the conversion of the Jews should attention be given to the Gentiles.” In their support, the Jewish Christians could point to the commission of Jesus when he instructed his disciples in Matthew 10:5-6 to avoid Gentile and Samaritan villages and focus on “the lost sheep of the house of Israel.” Paul does not refute the importance or even the priority of the mission to Israel. Instead, he argues in Romans 11:25-26 that the Jewish mission depended on outreach to the Gentiles, for “God has hardened the heart of the Jewish people until the full number of Gentiles have come in.” Paul has no interest in challenging the Jerusalem leadership and causing a split in the young and fragile Christian community.

3) Galatians 2:3-5 – Titus and the False Believers

a) With these verses we focus on the heart of the issue: the possible circumcision of Paul’s companion, Titus. The sentences are problematic because they are corrupted or written unclearly in the Greek manuscripts and the identity of the “false believers” of verse 3 is uncertain. The “false believers,” who Paul accused of spying on him, were evidently demanding the circumcision of Titus, but were unsuccessful in convincing the Jerusalem leaders of their legalistic mandate. The false believers are described as secretive, devious,

and unwarranted. It is clearly implied that those persons who champion their cause are also condemned. Paul relates the story for 2 reasons. 1st, it shows that the “pillar apostles” agreed with him on not demanding the circumcision of Titus. 2nd, it shows “the truth of the gospel” doesn’t need to be supplemented by any human action. Titus is identified in verse 3 as a Greek though Titus may not have been a citizen of Greece. The term may be used as in Galatians 3:28 to refer to an uncircumcised non-Jew, that is, a Gentile.

- b) The leadership of the Jerusalem Christians are Jewish who practice Judaism and move within Jewish circles. They presume that circumcision is an important sign of their relationship with God. Now they are confronted with a different understanding as stated by Frederick Weidmann, “Paul stands before them with one who literally embodies his missionary enterprise: an uncircumcised, non-Jewish Christian. Will the Jerusalem leadership accept Titus and the movement he embodies?”
 - c) Commentators have raised the question as to why Paul was so firm in refusing the command for Titus to be circumcised while in Acts 16:3 he arranged for the circumcision of another companion, Timothy. There is a consistent purpose, however, as stated in 1st Corinthians 9:19-23 where Paul proclaimed his mission strategy to “become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some.” In Timothy’s case, the young man was the son of a Jewish mother, and for the sake of sharing the gospel message with Jews, Paul used his freedom in Christ to consent to circumcision. For Titus, however, the situation is just the opposite, so when others demanded circumcision, Paul used his freedom in Christ to renounce such a demand. The gospel of Christ freed persons from the burden of religious restrictions so that the Christian message could be shared with all persons.
- 4) Galatians 2:6-10 – The Outcome of the Jerusalem Conference
- a) Verse 6 is difficult to interpret. In the Greek it is an incomplete sentence and its meaning is ambiguous. Commentators dispute the meaning of the phrase, “those who were supposed to be acknowledged leaders (what they actually were makes no difference to

me).” At 1st glance it seems to be a disparaging remark concerning the key figures in the Jerusalem church. It may well be, however, that Paul is simply arguing that person should not be judged by appearance or title but by what they do.

- b) The outcome of the meeting is described in verses 7-10. 1) There was a clear recognition of a division of labor where Paul was entrusted with proclaiming the gospel to the uncircumcised, while Peter was recognized as “apostle to the circumcised.” 2) Both were authorized and blessed by the same God to carry out their different missions. 3) The Jerusalem leaders recognized the calling of Paul to evangelize the Gentiles and they extended to Paul and Barnabas their affirmation and friendship. 4) Paul was asked to remember the impoverished members of the Jerusalem church, which he was eager to do. We know from other letters written by Paul that he undertook a collection of funds for the Jerusalem church and that the Galatian Christians contributed to that offering. The Jerusalem meeting came to a close with a firm agreement, backed by a strong sense of fellowship, and a determined effort to provide financial help. The Jerusalem conclave of diverse Christian leaders was characterized by unity and mutual affirmation.
- c) It is of vital importance that the Jerusalem meeting established church unity based on the grace filled gospel of Christ and not based on doctrinal conformity, ethnic identity, national allegiance, or social class. Those issues far too often have come to define the present-day character of Christian churches, but the Jerusalem agreement blesses an arrangement of unity amidst wide diversity. No Gentile was forced to become a Jew and no Jew was forced to deny their own heritage. Christian unity is based on the gospel of Christ. I saw these issues erupt into conflict when living among Baptist missionaries in Zimbabwe. Many of the missionaries simply transplanted their American form of worship by translating our English hymns into the Shona language and adopting our American style of worship. Other missionaries pushed for text and melodies written by Africans and accompanied by drums and dancing.
- d) The unity of the church, which was affirmed in the Jerusalem meeting, was expressed in public actions. 1) Paul went to Jerusalem “in response to revelation,” to meet in an open conversation that was widely shared with others. 2) All of the conferees affirmed the

agreement with a handshake signifying their unity and fellowship. 3) Paul agreed to collect an offering from Gentile churches throughout the Mediterranean world. Christian unity demands tangible actions of mutual support and is often best expressed in joint mission enterprises involving diverse groups focused on Christian service.

5) Galatians 2:11-14 – The Jerusalem Agreement Is Tested

- a) The unity and camaraderie of the Jerusalem meeting was quickly tested. Paul describes a much more confrontational meeting with Peter in Antioch where he says, “I opposed him to his face, because he stood self-condemned.” I can identify with Paul’s anger. I remember instances where I acted in accordance with directions from a larger group only to find myself attacked publicly by members of the group when I acted according to their instructions. Decisions in a religious setting can be just as destructive as in the secular world. Perhaps even more so; because nothing cuts as deeply as broken stained glass.
- b) For a time following the Jerusalem agreement things proceeded in an atmosphere of unity and goodwill. Verse 12 tells us that Peter openly had table fellowship with Gentiles in Antioch relaxing his strict observance of kosher law. But then James sent some emissaries from Jerusalem to check on Peter and when they appeared Peter “drew back and kept himself separate for fear of the circumcision faction.” At the same time there were other Jewish Christians, including Barnabas, who separated themselves from the Gentiles breaking with the Jerusalem agreement. Twice Paul labeled this as hypocrisy charging in verse 14 “that they were not acting consistently with the truth of the gospel.” Paul uses strong language because he saw the issue was crucial.
- c) In Peter’s defense he may be bending the rules he usually followed when he ate with the Gentiles in Antioch. Perhaps he was practicing a form of “situational ethics” in which he changed his behavior based on the context. Peter could also be defended by saying Jewish dietary laws were not regulated by the Jerusalem agreement. Paul never claims that Peter questioned the decisions made in Jerusalem. He attacks Paul on the issue of table fellowship. Paul is upset because Peter seems to be insisting on yet one more set of

Jewish regulations. In telling his own personal history, Paul recounted that he was well acquainted with the many pious regulations and holy observances that could be demanded of the Gentiles. Paul repudiates any attempts to add even more burdens upon non-Jews coming into the church. In verse 14 Paul concludes his criticism of Peter by saying if you can live and eat like a Gentile as you had been doing in Antioch, how can you now demand that Gentiles to live as Jews with regard to dietary laws? It should be noted that the outcome of this argument is not recorded.

Questions for reflection:

1. How important was the meeting in Jerusalem? What other possible outcomes could there have been? What could have happened to the church's future if a different decision had been made?
2. How diverse is our own church in terms of race, age, social class, and worship style? Should it be different and if so what can we do to make it so?
3. What can our church do to promote more diversity and appreciation of differences within our own American culture? What can each of us do to increase the diversity of our social contacts and to grow in our appreciation of the differences that exist in our American culture?
4. What do you think was the outcome of the argument in Antioch described in Galatians 2:11-14? What do you think the outcome should have been?