

## Galatians

18 February 2010

### Galatians 2:1-16

#### Introduction:

- (1) Last week we saw something of the operation of this 'present evil age' in the testimony of Paul. What he says in Galatians matches with his personal accounts in other places (such as Acts 26 and 26) and in his letters (e.g. Phil. 3 and Titus 3:1ff.). The Lord's grace revealed in him was astoundingly powerful because of his background, but all of this was under the Lord's providential provision (e.g. Gal. 1:15-16).
- (2) In the passage before us Paul address the question of his apostolic authority. Here, as in the Corinthian letters, he does so reluctantly, and is forced to it by his detractors. It follows on closely from Galatians 1:18-24, and it should be read without a break.
  - a. By way of background remember: Paul did not have a New Testament! His detractors had 'chapter and verse' for the importance of circumcision and the necessity for keeping the Law (e.g. Gen. 17:9-14; Ex. 4:24ff.)
  - b. Circumcision (and other distinctive markers such as Sabbath keeping and dietary laws) all had written authority as well as reinforced cultural practice and national identity supporting them!

#### Paul to the Gentiles, Peter to the Jews

- (1) The pattern we see in this passage reflects the picture in the book of the Acts
- (2) Peter had Gentile converts (e.g. Acts 10), but he took some persuading! Yet, he had been brought to see the reality of God's grace coming to the nations, and defended this vigorously in Jerusalem (e.g. Acts 11:1-18). But the main focus of his ministry was to the Jews, while Paul's focus was to the Gentiles (so Gal. 2:7-9).
- (3) However, there were many converts from the Pharisees in Jerusalem (cf. Acts 15:1, 5, 24 cf. 21:20) who were still aligned to the Law in their conscience and in their understanding of righteousness and national identity.
  - a. There are always folk who wish to 'spy out...and bring into bondage' (Gal. 2:4)
- (4) Paul is concerned that should such a party gain the upper hand in Jerusalem that his Gentile converts would be brought back into the fold of being a mere 'messianic' sect within Judaism...i.e. he would have run in vain (Gal. 1:2).
- (5) The pillars of the church in Jerusalem (as the Judaizing false teachers had probably spoken of them) had endorsed the ministry of Paul and Barnabas (Gal. 2:9).
- (6) Titus had been a 'test case' in all this (Gal. 2:1-3). Paul is free to operate as the circumstances dictate (contrast with Timothy's situation (Acts 16:3) but to circumcise Titus would have been to concede the ground to the Pharisaic sect of the Jerusalem church.
- (7) The passage that follows this description of the Jerusalem meeting (i.e. 2:11-16) presents the real issue. The principle of the Jerusalem meeting, was undermined by Peter (and even Barnabas') subsequent reversal and retreat from liberty to legalism.

## **Peter's Action and Its Message**

(1) The matter of food laws has been a big one throughout the history of Israel.

- Peter's reluctance to eat with the Gentiles is on display in the account of his mission to Cornelius in Acts 10.
- In initially refusing to visit a Gentile home, Peter was keeping rigorously to the Old Testament commandments that specified certain foods as clean or unclean, and the necessity to be separated from the peoples who ate unclean things.
  - See, for example, the regulations as set out in Leviticus 11 (cf. Deut. 14:12-20).
- The purpose of these Old Testament laws was that Israel would be separated to God, and differentiated from the other nations (Lev. 20:25-26).
  - While there may have been some connotations with idolatrous practices (e.g. boiling a kid in the mother goat's milk); or food safety/hygiene reasons (e.g. regarding pork), the overall importance was to set a boundary between Israel and the nations. Theirs was simply to obey...and thus to highlight the difference that came from being God's covenant people.

(2) The relationship of the Old Testament boundary markers to the New Covenant community was a test case of how fully the grace of God had been received.

- In Peter's own example, it was impressed on him that there was no distinction under the new covenant between Jew and Gentile, in so far as being recipients of God's grace was concerned. See, for example, the discussion that followed his visit to Cornelius' house in Acts 11:1-18, and Peter's own words in Acts 11:16-17, and the response of the Jewish believers in 11:18.
  - NB Note the way in which Peter reinforced the Gentiles' position in the gospel in the Jerusalem council in Acts 15:7-11!

(3) This was in accord with Jesus' own teaching, that all foods were now clean (Mark 7:6-23), and was certainly the view of Paul (the converted Pharisee!), who saw that nothing of itself was unclean and all was given to be enjoyed (see Rom. 14:14, 20; Titus 1:15).

(4) So Peter was really sending a very serious message to the Gentiles. Not simply a matter of menu preference, but of righteousness!

- In effect he was saying 'If I eat like a Jew I am righteous, if I eat like (or even with) a Gentile I am condemned. Therefore righteousness is a matter of keeping to the rules (of eating and drinking)!'.
- In the act of refraining to eat with the Gentiles (as had been his pattern) he was implying that the Gentiles had to become like Jews...grace was not really enough after all!

## **How Can It Be? What can explain such a reversal?**

(1) The argument was no doubt presented persuasively.

- Perhaps like this? "The signs of circumcision, food laws and Sabbath observance were given to Abraham and Moses by God! They were part of the great covenants with Abraham and Moses, to which all the people of Israel were pledged! They are so important that such things are spoken of as being of eternal significance (e.g. Gen. 17:13 'both he who is born in your house and he is bought with your money, shall surely be circumcised. So shall my covenant be in your flesh an everlasting covenant'). Did not Israel go into exile for treading underfoot the laws relating to the Sabbath, for eating unclean

things, for neglecting to circumcise their children? Did not the returning exiles vow to keep the laws again (e.g. Neh. 13). And what about these hundreds of years where we have had to strive to maintain our identity against Greece and Rome? And all the sacrifices of our forefathers? If you continue you will bring us all under the wrath of God. Yes, the Gentiles can come in, but the promises were that they would *join themselves* to the Jews...as they should. We must be pleasing God in all respects! The Gentiles cannot be allowed to join us in a way that compromises the high standards of righteousness that God expects!"

- But also, there is another thrust: that is from within the Flesh (about which we will say more as the series unfolds).
  - The Flesh wants to have something to present to God. It wants to cling to its own righteousness more than anything else!
    - § 'Legalism is the idea that we can win acceptance with God on the basis of something that is true about ourselves. That may be something we have done, something we have experienced, something infused into us or some privilege which distinguishes us from other people. Whatever it is, if it allows us to boast about ourselves before God it is legalism. If we deemed ourselves justified on the basis of national privilege it would be legalism. If we deemed ourselves justified on the basis of our own covenant keeping it would be legalism.' D. MacLeod, SBET, 22.1, 2004, p. 20
  - See in Phil. 3:9, where Paul implies that there is temptation to be found with some other form of righteousness.
- And we must not be too hasty in judging Peter (or even Barnabas)! Would we have resisted? Works of the law are deeply appealing to the human spirit, especially when couched in deeply persuasive arguments!
  - There is a constant pressure from the flesh to take the things which are *signs* of covenant blessing and turn them into *reasons* for blessing.

**But The Gospel Speaks Thus: 'By Works of the Law Will No Flesh Be Justified'!**

(1) The principle of Gal. 2:16 is repeated in other places. See Gal. 3:10f.; 5:4 (cf. Rom. 3:20) for example. The other way of putting it is in Gal. 2:21: if righteousness could come through the law, then Christ died in vain'.

- The Jerusalem Bible translates Rom. 3:20 helpfully. 'So then, no human being can be found upright at the tribunal of God by keeping the Law; all that the Law does is to tell us what is sinful'.
- There is never any justification in the law. The matter is not one simply of the 'boundary marker' issues, but anything by which we say we have something to present before God, something that is true of ourselves.
- To keep the whole law does not earn anything from God, it is what should have been the case anyway!
  - Paul will have much to say on the relation between grace and law later, but here there is simply (negative) equation 'works of the law = condemnation before God' contrasted with 'faith in Christ = justification before God'.

### **Justification is Solely on the Basis of Faith in the Crucified Christ.**

(1) Justification is at the heart of the letter. Justification is drawn from the language of the law court and is thus forensic. It relates to the declaration of one's standing before God.

- One is given a righteous standing before God, by faith in Christ (Gal. 2:16a).

(2) But note well: the basis of the justified standing is Christ's role as the crucified one.

- See Gal. 2:20 cf. the link between justification and the sacrifice of Christ in Rom. 3:21ff.
  - Justification and the remission of sins are two sides of the one event. There can be no just verdict of 'justified' if sins have not been dealt with.
    - § Psalm 65:3 NIV 'When we were overwhelmed by sins, you forgave our transgressions'; ESV 'When iniquities prevail against me, you atone for our transgressions'; JB 'Our faults overwhelm us, but you blot them out'.
  - This is to be understood in terms of the co-crucifixion of the believer with Christ, as in Gal. 5:24; 6:14; Rom. 6:2, 6-9; Col. 2:20; 3:1-4; 3:9; 2 Cor. 5:14.
- "All believers in Christ have 'died in relation to sin' (Rom. 6:2, 11), but the point stressed here is that, at the same time, they have 'died in relation to law'...Paul...no longer lives under the power of the law; he has been released from its dominion and has entered into new life" (F. F. Bruce, p. 142f.).
  - So also the exegesis of Paul's point in Rom. 7:1ff. where the best understanding of it is in relation to the contrast between being bound to the Law and now married to Christ. Normally in Jewish society, the woman had no option open to her to leave a marriage, so she was bound to her husband as long he lived. Husbands could put away their wives, but not vice versa. The Law, Paul argues, will never let us go or give us our freedom...and he will never die! In the illustration Paul is making the point that therefore there was no way out of being 'bound' to the Law except that the old 'husband' (i.e. the Law) died, or she died to her husband....but in Christ a death has taken place in which we have died to the Law, and now are remarried to Christ.. so that even though the Law (and all that it stood for in terms of Jewish identity and practice, for example) is still 'alive' (in the sense that it was still active in the world and all its demands were still vibrant in a believer's ear) we have in fact been released from that marriage to the Law and married to Christ in his resurrection. The old marriage to the Law was fruitless, but now we are married to Christ that we might be fruit for God. The emphasis is on the woman being bound under the Jewish economy without hope of release...but that now the church is married to a new husband in Christ, in whom the Law (who would never let the wife go free) has been put to death.
- We live in this new relation 'by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself up for me'.

(3) The emphasis for us to take away is this: *we are justified in Christ, for eternity!*