

Galatians 2: 6-10; “Favoritism versus Effectual Grace”, Message # 8 in the series – “Christ has Made Us Free”, A Bible Study prepared by Pastor Paul Rendall for the evening of July 12th, 2013, and conducted at the church.

The reason that Paul wrote this letter was because the churches in Galatia had been deceived into believing the lie that the gospel which Paul had preached to them was not sufficient to save them from their sins. They needed to add the works of the law to it in order to be saved. Paul has already declared to them in no uncertain words in Chapter 1, verses 8 and 9, that if anyone preached any other gospel to them, than the one that he had preached to them; they would come under the apostolic curse. In the remainder of the first chapter, then, he goes on to tell them that the gospel was not of man’s contrivance; it had come from God to all the apostles through “revelation of Jesus Christ”. (verse 12) This is what happened with Paul. Even though he was not of the original twelve apostles, he had seen the risen, living Christ and had been taught the true gospel by Him. God had called him by His grace, to reveal His Son in him, that he might preach Him among the Gentiles. Let us always remember that salvation is first and foremostly what God has done, and what He is doing for us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. It is not our trying to do the works of the law, either ceremonial or moral, in order to merit God’s favor. It is our faith in Jesus Christ which ultimately matters most. Now Paul builds upon this argument in verses 6-10 by talking about the other apostles, and himself in relation to them. He wants to show us, 1st, that there is no personal favoritism with God. And 2nd, he wants to show us that God does give distinguishing grace in regard to men’s ministries. These two things are not contrary to one another, as I shall attempt to show you in the next few minutes.

1st of all – Let us understand that with God there is no personal favoritism.

“But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.” Those who “seemed to be something” that he is referring to here, are the apostles who came before him. Those who are specifically mentioned in verse 9 are Peter, James, and John. The James here, is not James the son of Zebedee and brother of John. Rather he is James the brother of our Lord, and many believe, the son of Alpheus. In doing a little research on this I consulted with James Gardner’s Christian Encyclopedia, and he says under the title of James the Less, son of Alpheus, “He is styled the Lord’s brother; thus Paul says, ‘But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord’s brother.’” (Galatians 1: 19) The word brother was often applied to a near relation of any kind, and the general opinion is that he was the cousin our blessed Lord, being the son of Cleopas, or Alpheus, and Mary, sister to the mother of our Lord.” “He was surnamed the Just, on account of the remarkable purity of his

life.” I think that this analysis is very helpful concerning James. And we are told here by Paul that these three men mentioned were very great in their reputation in the eyes of the early Church.

But even though this was so, Paul gives us a true view of how God looked at them, and we can also apply this to ourselves and other Christians, and other people, in the way that we are to look at them. He says, “God shows personal favoritism to no man”. Turn with me over to Job Chapter 34, verse 16-20. “If you have understanding, hear this; listen to the sound of my words: Should one who hates justice govern?” “Will you condemn Him who is most just?” “Is it fitting to say to a king, ‘You are worthless,’ and to nobles, ‘You are wicked’?” “Yet He (that is God) is not partial to princes, nor does He regard the rich more than the poor; for they are all the work of His hands.” “In a moment they die, in the middle of the night; the people are shaken and pass away; the mighty are taken away without a hand.” Here we see God’s strict sense of justice in relation to His dealings with both the poor and rich. It does not matter if a man is rich; God will not regard the rich more than the poor in justice; for, they are all the work of His hands. He has made them both, and He will not have regard for the prince with his riches more than the poor man in his poverty. God will always reward a man according to his works, in strict justice.

You can see this also in Romans Chapter 2, verses 1-11. “Therefore you are inexcusable, O man, whoever you are who judge, for in whatever you judge another you condemn yourself; for you who judge practice the same things.” “But we know that the judgment of God is according to truth against those who practice such things.” “And do you think this, O man, you who judge those practicing such things, and doing the same, that you will escape the judgment of God?” “Or do you despise the riches of His goodness, forbearance, and longsuffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leads you to repentance?” “But in accordance with your hardness and your impenitent heart you are treasuring up for yourself wrath in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each one according to his deeds: eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek; but glory, honor, and peace to everyone who works what is good, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.” “For there is no partiality with God.” Joseph Excell in *The Pulpit Commentary* says: “Worldly rank is, of course, nothing with God. All mankind are his subjects and servants, whom he differentiates one from another solely by their moral and spiritual qualities. Nor does He regard the rich more than the poor. If earthly rank is of no account with God, much less is abundance of possessions.” “The parable of the rich man and Lazarus places His complete indifference in a strong light. For they all are the work of his hands.” “All classes of men, rich and poor, powerful and weak, are

equally God's creatures, brought into the world by him, given by him their several stations, and regarded by him with favor or disfavor, according as they conduct themselves in their various occupations and employments.”

But in regard to the particular consideration of these men in our study tonight, the apostles, we should understand that God never did have personal favorites. Christ Himself never expected Paul to submit to a course of instruction from the other apostles who had walked with the Lord Jesus when He engaged in His earthly ministry. And Peter was not the first pope. Christ did not expect that Paul would have to sit under the ministry of any of these great apostles or please any of these great apostles; these men of reputation. He knew that he did not need to envy their gifts or their ministry because they had walked with Jesus personally. He says, after he had met them and talked with them, that, “They added nothing to me.” You see, Paul had been given everything that he had in terms of salvation and gifts for ministry from Christ Himself. There was nothing that the other apostles could add to that. In applying this to ourselves, I believe that it is reasonable to conclude, that God Himself is our main teacher in how to live the Christian life, not men. It is not as though our Lord will not employ great and godly men to help us along in that instruction, but Christ Himself, by means of His Holy Spirit, is our first and primary teacher in every matter related to our making progress in righteousness and holiness, and in our learning how to glorify God. God does not have His favorites among Christian teachers today. Truth is truth and we should submit to God and Christ first of all, to be taught and led by our God, and then submit to be teachable in the context of a local church. Turn over with me to 1st John 2: 24-47. “Therefore let that abide in you which you heard from the beginning.” “If what you heard from the beginning abides in you, you also will abide in the Son and in the Father.” “And this is the promise that He has promised us—eternal life.” “These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.” “But the anointing which you have received from Him abides in you, and you do not need that anyone teach you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things, and is true, and is not a lie, and just as it has taught you, you will abide in Him.”

When we read these things we should understand that it is not as though we, as ordinary believers, should not submit to the authority of a pastor or join a local church so that we can receive regular instruction in the Word of God. We should do all of that; but we should always be looking beyond all of the means that God uses, to Christ Himself to confirm what men are attempting to teach us. We are not called to an itinerant apostolic ministry, but we do have a gift given to us by Christ, to use in relation to both the local church we are a member of, and also in relation to helping people in the world outside of the church as well. Your pastor or elders will be able to be able to foster that truth as they see your submission to God and to Christ. They should be able to recognize in you, that over time, God is teaching you and guiding you into a personal ministry of serving Him; His

kingdom and cause, if you are sensitive to His leading. Turn with me over to Acts Chapter 17, verse 10. “Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea.” “When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews.” “These were more fair-minded (more noble-minded, NAS) than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so. Now, notice the reason that these people were called, “noble-minded”. It was because they searched the Scriptures to see whether what the Apostle Paul had spoken to them lined up with what the Scriptures taught. They respected him, but they would be led to follow Christ by searching for themselves, and being led to the truth by the Holy Spirit of God. This is how the whole Christian life ought to be lived; not independent from the local church, or unwilling to listen to the pastor, but being willing to join the local church and regularly listening to the pastor preach because the Spirit has led you and is guiding you into all the truth.

2nd - Paul wants to show us that God does give distinguishing grace in regard to men’s ministries. (Verses 7 -10)

“But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.” “They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” God, it says here, committed a particular ministry to James, Cephas, and John. They were pillars in the Church as apostles who were speaking and upholding the Word of truth. Paul recognized that they were pillars, not because of anything that he or others saw in them personally. It was because of the grace that had been given to them by Christ. God gave them grace to minister to the circumcision. They were not called specifically to the Gentiles as Paul was. Peter had opened the door of ministry to the Gentiles in Acts 10, but Paul actually was called to become the apostle to the Gentiles. The apostles mentioned here in verse 9 recognized the grace that had been given to Paul by Christ, and they extended to him the right hand of fellowship. They wanted God to bless his ministry.

How often in the greater Church of Jesus Christ there exists a spirit of jealousy in regard to ministry and success in that ministry. This ought not to be among brethren. God is well able to bless and prosper every pastor’s ministry if He has called them to the work, and they are willing to let Him lead, and have all the glory. And even the ordinary Christian should never envy the ministry of the pastor or some other person in the church that they are a member of. Christ is able to richly bless you with fruit in whatever ministry, great or small, that He has called you to, and gifted you for. Turn with me over to Romans 15: 14-21. “Now I

myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.” “Nevertheless, brethren, I have written more boldly to you on some points, as reminding you, because of the grace given to me by God., that I might be a minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering of the Gentiles might be acceptable, sanctified by the Holy Spirit.” “Therefore I have reason to glory in Christ Jesus in the things which pertain to God.” “For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ has not accomplished through me, in word and deed, to make the Gentiles obedient—in mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God, so that from Jerusalem and round about to Illyricum I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.” “And so I have made it my aim to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build on another man’s foundation, but as it is written: ‘To whom He was not announced, they shall see; and those who have not heard shall understand.’” What wonderful principles Paul operated by, in terms of ministry, is evident from these words. He was confident that the brethren in Rome were filled with the Holy Spirit and able to admonish one another. He didn’t confine the ministry of truth to himself, but believed that they were able to admonish one another. Nevertheless, he did not see their ministry the same as his; indeed they should submit to his apostolic authority in his correction of them where they needed it. He wanted his offering of them to be acceptable to God, sanctified by the Holy Spirit. There is no thought of a church growth movement, only of looking for the Lord’s blessing to give fruitfulness and increase. This is why he could glory in God and not try to compete in ministry with other ministers. It was Christ alone who accomplished those things through him in word and deed as he was sensitive to the Spirit’s leading and walking in the truth. It was Christ’s power that allowed him to labor so strenuously and powerfully, not his own power. He did not want to build upon another man’s ministry but to fully exercise his own to the glory of God. He wanted other men’s ministries to be blessed and to flourish. Oh, how this glorifies God, when we learn to think and live like Paul. May the Lord be blessing us with his kind of wisdom.