
Standing for the Gospel

Galatians 1:11-2:10

Do you believe people will distort history in order to achieve their own ends? Politicians are amazingly adept at this, either about their own records, or even more famously, about the records of their opponents. The presidential primaries and elections promise to be full of amusing and awful distortions of fact and history for the sake of winning. While this is almost expected in politics, we are now finding that we cannot trust scientists or historians. The facts of research are often distorted to serve ones' theory.

Global warming is an interesting distortion aimed to serve an agenda. The alarm over the supposed increase in the average temperature of the earth has been exposed on many fronts as having an environmental and political agenda. The facts of science simply do not hold up. Creighton has written two, science-myth busting novels which he says are "fiction, except where they are true."

It is also fascinating to watch the history of the Muslim world being rewritten to tame down and tone down a violent and vicious religion. It has been a religious culture that has produced amazing mathematics and awful murders. But you would hardly know that from listening to the peaceful palaver passing for insightful analysis.

One of the challenges for leadership is learning to disagree with integrity. What I have often seen is a failure to accurately represent those who think differently. This is dishonest and disabling of real interaction toward resolution. Our political leadership needs to think about this. We need to think about this in areas where we have honest differences of opinion. For example, I believe the use of the debate technique of a straw man must be shunned by Christians. To intentionally misrepresent your opponent in order to cause him to defend what he does not actually believe is wrong.

Paul is setting the record straight. He has been misrepresented and lied about. So here we are with real story of confronting with the gospel.

His Responsibility for the Gospel Message

(1:11-24)

His Response to the Accusations

(v.11-12)

¹¹ For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. ¹² For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.

Paul's assertions here are a response to an accusation made against him. The false teachers, the Judaizers, were saying that what Paul taught was man-made. It was not according to the traditional reading of the Old Testament. He had changed what the Bible taught in order to make it easier for Gentiles to be saved.

Paul responds that the gospel he preaches is not a human gospel. It is neither according to human standards nor according to human giving. What he teaches he has received by direct revelation from Christ.

It is not of man – not compiled by human authority, reasoning, logic (v.1, 11).

It is not from man – was communicated to Paul by Christ alone (v.1, 12).

His Reception of the Gospel

(v.13-17)

¹³ For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. ¹⁴ And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers. ¹⁵ But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, ¹⁶ was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; ¹⁷ nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus.

A pack of wolves are trailing along behind Paul. Everywhere he went and established a church with Gentile converts, membership and ministry, these wool suited hounds have come in behind to defame the minister and distort the message of the gospel. They have been emboldened by minor successes and are now seeking to win converts to their sect all throughout Galatia. Apparently, they are attacking Paul by inventing stories and interpreting facts wrongly. They have accused him of secret trips, hidden agendas and private aspirations to covertly move the center of the church from Jerusalem to Antioch.

To counter the false claims and accusations made by his opponents, he sets the facts straight. At the center of this narrative of his conversion is the insistence that he received the gospel directly from Christ. Further, due to the simple facts of history, he could not possibly have received the gospel he preached from anyone at Jerusalem.

His testimony begins with his persecution of the church. He had obtained authority to find, prosecute and kill anyone who taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did so as a result of his growth and standing in Judaism and as a Jewish leader. Note what he is saying. His zeal for the rabbinical traditions, the Pharisees interpretation of the Old Testament, his passion for a legalistic, Mosaic righteousness motivated a hatred for the true gospel. He has effectively just indicted his opponents. He persecuted the church physically; they are persecuting the church doctrinally. They are doing so for the same reasons.

He relates how God, in sovereign grace and mercy, had chosen him, called him, saved him and sent him to preach. He, that former most righteous of Pharisees, was to now preach the gospel of salvation among the Gentiles. His conversion and assurance came through a disclosure of Christ in Him. He, by faith, had Christ disclosed to him

He does not then consult with anyone around him nor does he go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles there. Instead, he went alone into Arabia and returned to Damascus. Other texts tell us that during this period, he received by revelation the truths

about Christ and the church that shaped his apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament that we read in the epistles.

So, he was terribly wicked as a righteous Jew. God had saved and sent him. What he preached was directly from God and authoritatively for the church.

His Relationship with the Jerusalem Church (1:18-2:10)

Now he begins to clarify his relationship with the Jerusalem church. This is extraordinary in that it gives the time between events that appear at first glance from the book of Acts to be close together. We are often in a hurry to move into leadership. Listen, Paul, sent to preach the gospel, waited for around 11 years until called to Antioch. That does not mean he was not ministering; but it is extraordinary patience in waiting for God's providence to move him from local into global ministry.

His Call on Peter (v.18-24)

¹⁸ Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to visit Cephas and remained with him fifteen days. ¹⁹ But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother. ²⁰ (In what I am writing to you, before God, I do not lie!) ²¹ Then I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. ²² And I was still unknown in person to the churches of Judea that are in Christ. ²³ They only were hearing it said, "He who used to persecute us is now preaching the faith he once tried to destroy." ²⁴ And they glorified God because of me.

Paul relates his visit to the church in Jerusalem three years after his conversion (v.18-19). He is deeply concerned that people understand that he has no personal animus against Peter. His defense of the gospel is not intended to be an attack on the church at Jerusalem nor on its leadership. He spent two weeks visiting with Peter. He does not remember seeing any of the other apostles except for James, the Lord's brother. This assertion must be contrary to what his opponents are saying. Look at this exclamation in verse 20, "I am not lying..." Others must have accused him of misrepresenting what he had done.

In spite of visiting with the apostles there, he still was largely unknown in the churches in Judea. They had heard of him, as you can well imagine. Yet they came to not only accept him but to glorify God because of him (v.22-24). Imagine if Osama Bin-Laden suddenly emerged and began meeting with trusted, prominent Reformed Christian leaders and professed Christ among them, asking to be baptized as a Christian. Such an announcement would be met with certain skepticism. But suppose he met with the Elders here and the Fellowship of Reformed Evangelicals and it was clear from his testimony that he was converted and following Christ. Then, there would be amazing joy and great glorifying of God.

His Concerns with the Leadership***(2:1-3)***

¹ Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. ² I went up because of a revelation and set before them (though privately before those who seemed influential) the gospel that I proclaim among the Gentiles, in order to make sure I was not running or had not run in vain. ³ But even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek.

Fourteen years later, Paul goes up to Jerusalem accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. He is bringing a Jewish and a Gentile ministry partner. He went because God had told him directly to go. In a private meeting with the church's leadership, he laid out the gospel as he preached it (v.1-2).

Now, the question is: did Paul do this in order to have his teaching approved by the church at Jerusalem? I do not believe so. Paul goes up to Jerusalem to confront the leadership with the problems of legalism there. His concern is not to have them approve what he taught. He is confronting them about their own theological drift.

Where do I get this? The phrase, "To make sure that I was not running or had run, in vain," Paul uses this phrase here in Galatians (4:11) and in 1 Thessalonians (3:5) when he is concerned about other's failures. He sees himself as laboring in vain when people begin to stray in doctrine or in life. That he and the apostles were on the same page is evidenced by the fact that no one there compelled Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, to be circumcised (v.3). Now we have the first mention of the core issue. Having come to Christ for salvation, does a Christian return to Moses for transformation or sanctification? We will be following the issue through the book. But even at this point, it is evident that since we have been sanctified at our conversion, since we have been delivered from this present evil age, then we do not need and should not require the works of the Law. *Gentiles neither need to be circumcised nor to become Jews because of the Law to be saved or in order to grow in Christ.*

His Confrontation with the False Brothers***(v.4-6)***

⁴ Yet because of false brothers secretly brought in—who slipped in to spy out our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, so that they might bring us into slavery— ⁵ to them we did not yield in submission even for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. ⁶ And from those who seemed to be influential (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—those, I say, who seemed influential added nothing to me.

However, sitting among the leadership of the church, were those of the Judaizers sect. These were false brothers, unbelieving men who were in the church and were slipped into the meeting to see what Paul was teaching and to oppose it. Their efforts were underhanded and sneaky. They did not act with integrity. They did not come with clear, reasoned honesty to wrestle with the issue at hand. Their tactics then were no different than what Paul faced at Galatia and what we face today. It is quite evident

that even in many evangelical churches there are those who act as these did and teach what they taught.

But Paul is not finished. They were there to spy out the glorious freedom we have in the New Covenant and to bring professing Christians back into bondage or slavery under the Old Covenant. So Paul would not submit to them. They may have been influential and respected in the church, but Paul was not going to yield to them. The gospel granted grace to Jew and Gentile alike. He was not going to allow anyone to be brought back into the old realm again. They were not going to be allowed to add anything to the gospel he taught (v.4-5).

Notice how he characterizes them. They slip in to spy out. They enslave. They demanded submission from Paul. But Paul was fighting to maintain the integrity of the gospel. And he still is. He is certainly saying that these people have little changed. They are secretive and underhanded. They use influence and position to try to force others to yield to them (v.6). They are seeking to enslave people to the Old Covenant and Judaism. And he will not yield to them, not ever, not at all. Neither will we. We will hold fast to the gospel. We will preach and practice the saving grace of God which has delivered from our sins and this evil realm. We will see the Old Covenant fulfilled in Christ. We will live in the newness of the new. We will resist all attempts to take us back to Moses.

His Confirmation by the Apostolic Leadership

(v. 7-10)

⁷ On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised ⁸ (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹ and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰ Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Finally, the false teachers and their error were exposed. Their phony attempts at unity which were dividing the church were over turned. The apostles affirmed the gospel that Paul had taught. This would be the watershed council. From here, no one may preach or practice a gospel contrary the whole of Paul's teaching. They saw the saving and enabling grace that God had given Paul and Barnabas and Titus. They partnered together with them in the gospel.

Evidently, the Judaizers were attempting to divide Paul and Peter. They were saying that they were teaching different gospels. This was not so. Peter had received a direct vision sending him to preach the gospel to a Gentile, Cornelius. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. However, there was not and is not a difference in the gospel. There is no Petrine gospel and there is no Pauline gospel. There is no Jewish gospel and there is no Gentile gospel. There is simply the gospel. Now, God's grace primarily enabled Peter to take the gospel to the Jews. Paul was primarily enabled to take the gospel to the Gentiles. But it was the same message through the same method. The difference

was the primary ministry target. Peter would go to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. And all would remember to preach the gospel to the poor, something already dear to Paul's heart.

So, the council concluded. There is only one gospel. It is for all people. It brings us into the freedom of grace and delivers us from the slavery to Law. This is what Paul taught. This is what the Bible records. This is what we believe and teach. Now, many labels down through history have been slapped on people who teach that we are neither justified nor sanctified (transformed) by the Law. What we teach is sometimes labeled Antinomianism. This charge is commonly lobbed at us from deep in the Reformed camp. I attended a conference in 1994 where one prominent pastor and theologian, expounding on the Sermon on the Mount, no less, said; "Moses bring us to Christ for salvation. Christ takes us to Moses for sanctification." This is heresy. This is exactly the error, if applied consistently in daily living, that the circumcision party in Jerusalem taught. We are of the grace group! We believe the gospel - we will live in the freedom of the New Covenant. We will live holy lives under grace.

Reflect and Respond

The gospel in its truth is to be believed and lived.

It must be received from the Scriptures alone. There is no other source for the gospel. This book is truth. It does not matter what you think about it, what you feel about it. This is the truth. If you do not believe the gospel that the Holy Word of God teaches you will die in your sins forever separated from God in eternal judgment of hell. Will you not believe the gospel and bow to God today?

It must be lived in our lives. We must know and understand the gospel in such a way that it shapes everything. We must be discerning with it. We must guide and guard our relationships with it. We must fight sin with it. We must turn away from any teaching that grounds our righteousness in anything except the work of Christ.

Here is the gospel we have been taught, we have received and we hold fast to:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.