

GALATIANS 3
Paul's Account of the Jerusalem Council
Galatians 2:1-10
By Ron Harvey

INTRODUCTION

There is really only one gospel and that is that Jesus Christ died for sinners and whoever believes shall be saved. That is the gospel of Christianity. And what distinguishes Christianity from all other religions is that in Christianity salvation is by grace, through faith. All other religions are by works. So, even though there are a myriad of other religions, they can all be grouped together as "works kind of religions."

But Christianity is a grace kind of religion. In Christianity, salvation is given by God. It is not earned. God is the doer, man is the receiver. God performs the work and man receives it by faith.

This is contrary to all the pagan religions of the world. Of course there is only one true religion and that is the religion of the one true God. Whatever it is that God prescribes, that is true religion. Whatever religious beliefs and practices that men devise are false religions.

Now there are several things that typically characterize religions that are devised by man.

Man's religion is typically polytheistic. Man says there are many gods. This typified the religions of Rome and Greece during the time of Christ. Of course, God specifically told Israel that there is one God and one only. But the heathen nations continued to worship many gods.

Man's religion may also be pantheistic. This suggests that God is in everything. They equate God to the universe. God is not so much a person and he is an influence. God is nature itself.

But the chief characteristic of man's religion is that there is may be acceptance with God by works. Man must do something to be saved. Man must offer sacrifices. Man must be a good, moral person. Man must attend religious services. Man must pray. Man must be baptized. On and on it goes. With different religions, there are different requirements. With Jehovah witnesses, man must canvass door to door as a witness for God in order to earn salvation.

But when Jesus Christ saved Paul, he took him into Arabia and he taught the gospel to Paul. And he taught Paul that salvation is by faith and faith alone.

This was a message that was completely foreign to all the heathen religions of the world. Their religions were by works. But Jesus taught Paul that God's religion is by grace. It is interesting that the gospel message as given to Paul was not only contrary to the thinking of the heathen, but also it was contrary to the thinking of the Jews. The Jews were steeped in the rituals and the ceremonies of Judaism. And they were steeped in all the requirements of the Mosaic law. And in addition to that, they had added their interpretations of the law as a whole set of traditions. Why, their whole life was wrapped up in performing these rituals and traditions. And if they did not perform them, they suffered severe penalties under the law.

And then, here comes Paul saying, it is not necessary to do all these things. It is not necessary to bring your sacrifices. It is not necessary to go to the priests. All the feast days are inconsequential anymore. It is not necessary to be circumcised to be saved. It is not even necessary to be a descendant of Abraham. Salvation is now available to Gentiles as well as Jews.

I think you can see what a drastically different message this was. Gentiles and Jews alike were invited to salvation and they were invited on the basis of grace. Jews were not invited on the basis of their Jewishness any longer.

Now to a large degree, the book of Acts is about the application of this new message to the Gentiles and also to the Jews. It is about how the message was received gladly by many Gentiles and how the message was opposed by many of the Jewish religious leaders. It is a story about the effort of the Jews to impose their Jewish religion into the gospel. And it is a story of the hard fight which Paul waged to protect the simple integrity of the gospel. Remember when Paul was about to die, he told Timothy,

I have fought the good fight.

II Timothy 4:7

And a large part of the fight was the fight to protect the gospel which he had been taught by Christ. Though it would be opposed the world over, though it would be opposed especially by his own kinsmen (the Jews) Paul was commissioned by Christ to preach the gospel and to wage a war against the perversion of the gospel.

Now the book of Galatians is Paul's angry defense of the gospel. Paul has preached the gospel of Christ to the various churches of Galatia and he has preached that salvation is a free offer of grace. But others have

come in and taught the people that it was necessary for the Gentile converts to be circumcised.

Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

Galatians 5:2

Now Paul was mad at these Jewish teachers who had come over to Galatia. And he tells the Galatian churches that this issue has already been decided by the Jerusalem church. Before writing the book of Galatians, Paul had already had a meeting with the other apostles and leaders in Jerusalem about this very issue. Now, this meeting is described by Luke in the book of Acts. (Acts 15) And we have Paul's account of the meeting in Galatians 2. So,

I have titled the message tonight "Paul's Account of the Jerusalem Council." And he tells the Galatians about his visit to Jerusalem where this issue of circumcision was dealt with.

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 . . .

Galatians 2:2

So you see here that Paul went to Jerusalem to deal with this issue. And he met with the notable leaders of the church.

Now, it is clear that even the original apostles were having difficulty with this doctrine.

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 . . .

Galatians 2:9

Now this meeting with the elders and the apostles in Jerusalem was quite a long time after Paul's original conversion. It was at least 14 years after the conversion of Paul. Now, as I said, this seems to be the same meeting in Jerusalem that is described by Luke in Acts 15. This is Paul's meeting with the Council of Church leaders in Jerusalem. Look at Acts

15:1.

And certain men which came down from Judea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

Acts 15:1

So Paul has returned from his first missionary journey and he has come back to the church at Antioch. (See Acts 14:24-28) And Paul and Barnabas are having a great time there with the church in Antioch telling them of all the great things God is doing among the Gentiles. And then, just when things are going good, certain men came down from Judea. (15:1) And they taught the church there at Antioch that circumcision was necessary for salvation. Now notice, they weren't just teaching that circumcision was a good idea, or that circumcision was advisable to placate the Jews. Rather, they taught that it was necessary to be saved. (v.1)

Now when Paul and Barnabas heard about this, they called these teachers into their office and there was a big row. (v.2) Luke calls it,

No small dissention and disputation.

Now these teachers were obviously unable to change Paul's mind. But apparently Paul and Barnabas were unable to convince these teachers that salvation was by faith alone, because they decided that Paul and Barnabas should go up to Jerusalem and meet with the apostles and elders in Jerusalem to discuss this matter.

So Paul and Barnabas packed up and they headed to Jerusalem.

Now what is interesting is that on the way to Jerusalem they passed through Phoenicia and Samaria. And they preached the gospel. And I am sure that Paul and Barnabas preached the pure gospel. And there was great joy among the brethren because of the conversion of the Gentiles. (15:3)

And then, Paul and Barnabas arrived in Jerusalem. And the first they that they did was meet with the church. (v.4) And seated in the congregation were the apostles and the elders. And they declared all that God had done with them. (v.4)

But look what happened next.

But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them and to command them to keep the law of Moses. (v.5)

Here we go. Right there in the Jerusalem church, there was a sect of the Pharisees. And it says they “rose up.” So, they stood up and the confronted Paul and they stated their position:

- (1) It was necessary to circumcise the Gentiles who were being saved, and
- (2) It was necessary for the Gentiles to obey the law of Moses.

So, the apostles and the elders had a meeting to consider the matter. (v.6)

And there was much disputing. (v.7) Finally, they let Peter speak. (vs.7-11)

1. Peter reminds them of how God had gone to the Gentiles. (Acts 10,11)
2. God gave them the Holy Spirit just as he gave Him to us. (v.8)
3. God made no difference between them and us. (v.9)
4. God saved them by faith. (v.9)
5. Why do we want to make them obey the law for salvation? (v.10)

Note: The Mosaic Law is called a yoke.

6. Salvation is by grace. (v.10)
7. Salvation is by grace even for us! (v.10)
8. Salvation is by grace for them! (v.10)

And then, Barnabas and Paul got up to speak. (v.12)

Note the respect and solemnity which was evident in the church. (v.12)

And they told of all the wonders and miracles God had wrought among the Gentiles.

Note: The miracles and wonders confirmed that God was saving them.

Then, James got up and quoted Amos 9:11.

What you are seeing is a fulfillment of what the prophet Amos said.

Then, the apostles wrote letters to the Antioch church and sent them by Judas and Barsabas. (vs.22-30)

Now there is the account of this Jerusalem Council found in Acts 15. Now you will notice that in this Acts 15 account, Paul's side of the story is not told. This is Luke's account. Paul speaks only in Acts 15:12 when he described the miracles and wonders which God had done among the Gentiles.

But when you get over the Galatians chapter 2, you get Paul's account of the Jerusalem Council. (Galatians 2:1-10)

I. Paul's motivation for going to Jerusalem.

A. To protect the integrity of the gospel.

Gal. 1 we saw that he had received the gospel directly from Jesus. Jesus had taught him the gospel. And I am sure that Jesus was very clear in his presentation of the gospel to Paul. And we see how zealous Paul is in Gal. 1 for the true gospel.

B. Gal. 2:2 we see that Paul was instructed to go to Jerusalem by revelation.

II. Paul's strategy.

Paul didn't just go unprepared. Paul had a plan.

A. He took Titus with him.

Now Titus was a Gentile convert and he was uncircumcised. And Paul said, "Come on Titus, we are going to Jerusalem." It is like when you have a congressional hearing to debate whether or not to fund research for some disease – you parade those that have that disease in front of the congressmen and you make your argument real instead of just theoretical.

And Paul took Titus with him to Jerusalem to make his argument real. "OK Peter and James and John. OK elders of the church, here is Titus. He is a Gentile convert. He is filled with the Holy Spirit. He is uncircumcised. Now let's discuss whether it is necessary to circumcise him.

- B. Paul sought a private meeting with the leaders. (v.2)
- III. Paul's immediate success. (v.3)
- IV. Paul's opponents (v.4)
 - A. False brethren.
 - 1. They purported to be believers (brethren).
 - 2. They were false.

Note: They were not believers because they added to the gospel. They taught that salvation was not by faith alone but by faith plus circumcision and the Mosaic law. Therefore, they did not trust exclusively in the work of Christ. They did not believe that Christ and Christ alone was sufficient. "They said, It is Christ plus . . ."

And therefore, Paul calls them false brethren.

Principle: We must put all our confidence in the Lord Jesus Christ and his work. It is not 90% Christ and 10% works. It is all Him. My salvation rests 100% on the work of Christ. All I do is receive it by faith. If I say it is faith plus baptism, I am saying that Christ's work did not save me, but I must do something to add to his work. If I say that I must go to Mass every week to be saved, I am adding to His work. If I

say that I must do this or that, I am adding to His work.

Notice how these false brethren were a major source of grief to Paul. (II Cor.11:25,26) They are lumped in with beatings and stoning and robbers.

B. They are sneaks, (v.4)

1. Brought in unawares. (paraisaktos) They were smuggled in.

This implies that there was a subversive plot to bring these teachers into the church in Antioch. It was a Jewish, undercover operation, and these teachers were smuggled in.

2. They came in privily. (paraiserchomai) They came in stealthily. They came in under the radar. It was a sneak attack into the church at Antioch.

C. They are spies. Their motive wasn't really to do the Lord's business, but rather, they came to spy on Paul and Barnabas.

Note what their motivation really was: To bring Paul and Barnabas and the church into bondage. They wanted to bring the church back into Judaism. They weren't interested in the gospel. They weren't interested in Christ. They were interested in their religion. And they came to the church to spy on them in order to bring them into bondage.

Note: Judaism is termed bondage. (See II Cor.3:7,9)

Note: The gospel is termed liberty. The true gospel is the freedom to be saved by faith alone. It is freedom from works. It is freedom from the requirements of the Mosaic Law. It is freedom from the bondage of sin, because God says, "There are no requirements on you. Simply believe."

This is the issue of Galatians. Is salvation by faith alone, or is it by faith plus something? Paul says it is by faith alone. I don't

have to eat certain meats on Fridays. I don't have to perform rituals. I don't even have to be baptized to be saved. (I am baptized as an act of obedience but not to be saved.) I don't have to be circumcised. I don't have to witness to 1000 people. I don't have to offer continual sacrifices. I don't have to repeat a rote prayer. I don't have to say "Hail Marys." I don't have to confess my sins to a human priest. I don't have to go down to the front of the church. I don't have to sacrifice my babies on an altar of fire. I don't have to become a better person to be saved. All I can do is the one thing that is doing nothing at all – believing.

V. Paul's courage. (v.5)

Now when Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem for this Council Meeting, they would not budge in the face of pressure from those of reputation in the church.

Now it says in verse two that Paul and Barnabas met privately with those of reputation. These included apostles and elders and church leaders.

And Paul says, we did not give ground. They did not crawl into the meeting as though they were lesser apostles. Rather, they held their ground boldly.

They did it for the sake of the gospel.

They did it for the sake of those who had heard the gospel.

Note: The issue here was not really circumcision. The issue was the gospel.

VI. The ultimate success of Paul. (vs.6-10)

A. They seemed to be somewhat.

I suppose the apostles and the elders came to the meeting with an air of importance.

B. Paul paid no undue respect to these leaders.

C. They added nothing to Paul.

They didn't add one bit of knowledge to Paul. They didn't tell him anything that he didn't already know. They had nothing to add to his understanding.

On the other hand,

D. We showed them a thing or two.

1. They saw that the gospel of uncircumcision was committed to Paul.

2. The apostles saw the grace that was given to Paul.

E. We walked out of there with their blessing.