

2:1 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. 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. 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.

Paul continues the defense of his ministry by recounting his relationship with the Jerusalem apostles. After 14 years, Paul went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas. When exactly this took place depends on how you understand the reckoning of time in the New Testament (NT) and where you begin calculating the 14 years. The NT uses an inclusive reckoning of time in which any part of a day or a year is counted as a whole. For instance, Jesus rose after three days, or on the third day, but he did not spend 72 hours in the grave. He was buried on Friday evening and resurrected on Sunday Morning, yet the NT writers considered it 3 days. In the case of Paul's 14 years it could have been a complete 14 or as little as 12 using the inclusive reckoning. The question now is whether one should add the 14 years onto the three already mentioned or whether they were simultaneous. It is likely Paul is referring to 14 years from his conversion so that they 14 years and the 3 years overlap. This gives us a time table of Paul's life that fits with identifying Gal. 2:1-10 with the Famine Visit of Acts 11:19-30 (Paul was converted around 33 A.D. and he would have gone to Jerusalem around 45-47 A.D. which is before the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15).¹

In recounting this second visit to Jerusalem, Paul demonstrates his solidarity with the Jerusalem apostles and the unity of the gospel they proclaimed. If the Judaizers in Galatia were right then there was a schism between Paul and Peter, James and John over the exact nature and implications of the gospel. In fact, the Judaizers were wrong and Paul had sought unity with the other apostles even

¹The commentaries are very helpful here. Note, esp. Richard N. Longenecker, *Galatians* (WBC; Dallas: Word Books, 1990) and Timothy George, *Galatians* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Hollman Publishers, 1994).

though he did not need their approval. Paul makes it clear that he did not go up to get the other apostles' approval but in response to a revelation. This was not the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 because in that case Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem as part of a delegation from Antioch to settle a dispute with those who were preaching the need for circumcision as a requirement for salvation. Also, in Acts 15, the meeting was more public and the result was publicized. In Gal. 2, however, Paul met with the other apostles privately (v. 2).

According to Paul, his motivation was to secure unity with the other apostles in order to make sure he “was not running or had not run in vain” (v. 2). Paul is not speaking out of both sides of his mouth. First he claims that he did not consult with anyone regarding the gospel revealed to him by Jesus (1:11-24), but now he claims he went to “set before” the other apostles the gospel that he proclaims “among the Gentiles.” The motivation for relating the gospel he was preaching was not to gain approval or to make sure he didn't have it wrong. Paul was convinced of the accuracy and truthfulness of what he preached because it had been revealed to him. In order to prevent a crisis in the new churches he was establishing and causing great harm to the faith of the young Gentile converts, Paul sought solidarity with the other apostles in order to head off any possible division, and he found it. While in Jerusalem visiting with the apostles, Paul says that “even Titus, who was with me, was not forced to be circumcised, though he was a Greek” (v 3).

Some “false brothers” were secretly brought in who sought to spy out their “freedom in Christ” and to promote the cause of circumcision (v. 4-5). Their goal, Paul says, was to “bring us into slavery.” Wherever Christ is working to bring freedom through salvation, our Enemy works to bring condemnation and subjection to man-made religion. These “false brothers” were no doubt sincere in their convictions and sought only to protect something they held very dear. Regardless of their intentions or motivations however, these men were adding to the gospel and therefore taking

away from Jesus. These men were resisted and Paul did not give into them for a moment. We must always be on guard against those who would impose additional requirements onto the gospel of Jesus Christ. As believers in Christ, our righteousness comes through faith in Jesus and not by observing any tradition or keeping the law. The Judaizers sought to preserve the Mosaic law by maintaining the sign of circumcision which had taken on greater significance in Jewish life during this time. Circumcision was instituted by God in the covenant with Abraham in Genesis 17:1-14. In the reign of Antiochus IV (175-163 B.C) circumcision was outlawed and babies who had been circumcised were put to death along with their mothers.² No doubt, such persecution elevated the practice of circumcision in the eyes of the Jews and made it a prominent mark of Jewish identity. We can begin to understand the emotional conflict on the part of Jewish Christians over such an important cultural practice.

Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, and Paul would not submit to the circumcision crowd because they were diminishing the heart of the gospel. It was not that circumcision in itself was an issue: “For neither circumcision counts for anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creation” (Gal. 6:15). What is important here is the attempt to impose circumcision as a necessity for salvation (see Acts 15:1).

Paul makes it clear, however, that despite the Judaizers' attempts, the gospel and the unity of the church are preserved: “On the contrary, when they saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised (for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), 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” (Gal. 2:7-9). The point here is not that Paul preached one gospel while Peter

²Timothy George, 143.

preached another. They preached the same gospel. The point is that they were focused on two different cultures. The gospel is the same for both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. What changes, however, are methods and presentation.

IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the text are profound for us. You have been hearing us talk a great deal about being missional and the need to be contextual as a church. We are not advocating a watering down of the gospel for the sake of attracting a crowd, far from it. Instead, we are advocating that we return the gospel and abandon traditions of men in order to re-tool and communicate to an unchurched lost culture. This is exactly what Paul and Peter were doing when they preached. They preached the same gospel message but they adapted their preaching and their outreach to fit the culture they were addressing. The gospel is preached one way in Pisidian Antioch (Acts 13) and another at Athens (Acts 17), but it is the same gospel.

On one occasion Paul circumcised Timothy (Acts 16:3; this was after the Jerusalem Council!), but he refused to circumcise Titus. Why? Timothy had a Jewish mother and it would have been offensive the Jews Paul was trying to reach had Timothy been uncircumcised. Titus, however, was a Gentile and did not need to be circumcised.