



Faith not Works as the Way to Justification Galatians 2

Introduction

Paul has established that his apostleship was independent from the other apostles. Now he affirms his relationship and cooperation with them, documenting their mutual entanglements with the Judaizers.

The Pharisees as Judaizers

The cultural shock of the gospel began as early as John the Baptist's ministry. (Matthew 3:1,7-10). The Pharisees were the first Judaizers. Claiming ownership of the Law of Moses, they sensed that Jesus posed a threat to the system of Judaism which had evolved from it. The Law was their system - inviolable and entrenched. Actually, the issue was more their representation of the Law of Moses rather than their passion for it. They maintained their power over the people by being the upholders and watchdogs of the Law, a responsibility they had usurped from the priests at least a century before. There were no Pharisees in the Old Testament. They arose as a patriotic political party after the return of the exiles to a homeland which would henceforth be under foreign rule. Keeping the Mosaic Law had become both a personal duty and national one.

New Wine but Old Wineskins

When Jesus came teaching and preaching the kingdom of God, the Pharisees were jealous of Him (Matthew 27:18). After His crucifixion, with His followers spreading the Good News, Christianity seemed at first like an extension of Judaism. But the new wine could not be contained in the old wineskins (Luke 5:37-39). No one understood this better than Paul, the ex-Pharisee. As non-Jews accepted Christ, without the Law, even converted Jews were confused. Where did the Law fit in? What would life be like without the familiar rituals, and more important, without the general agreement on laws, morals and ethics? James wrote the Book of James in answer to these questions, probably after the First Church Council, perhaps to calm and instruct Jewish believers who felt they had lost their heritage.

First Church Council

At first the Judaizers may have been comprised of both saved Jews and some who seemed to be saved (Matthew 13:20, 21). Their attempt to impose the Law on Gentile believers, sincere though it may have been, caused strife and division at Antioch. The result was the First Church Council in Jerusalem, presided over by James.

Present were Peter, Paul and Barnabas who spoke for justification by faith alone (Acts 15:6-12). James ruled favorably and wrote the decision in a letter to be read in the churches. He sent along Judas and Silas for reinforcement and explanation if necessary.

Increased Opposition

After this, Judaizers, much more hostile and vicious than at first, hounded Paul, harassed and confused his converts and sought to undermine his ministry. They were as determined to inflict circumcision on the Gentiles as Paul had been to wipe out Christianity.

Paul gives the Galatians this history in order to counteract the lies told by the Judaizers and to give them the whole story - which they had not needed before, but now needed - as well as to unite his position with that of the apostles.

Outline of Galatians 2

- I. Paul's Stand for Gentile Freedom from the Law - Galatians 2:1-14
- II. Church Council's Decision Concerning Gentiles - Acts 15
- III. Paul's Explanation of Justification by Faith - Galatians 2:15-21

I. Paul's Stand for Gentile Freedom from the Law - Galatians 2:1-14

A. In Jerusalem - Galatians 2:1-10

1. Exhibit A - Titus - 2:1-3

After fourteen years, Paul and Barnabas again went up to Jerusalem taking with them the uncircumcised Titus as exhibit A of a Greek saved by faith without the law. Could he be accepted as equally saved and equally justified solely on his faith in Christ without the works of the law, particularly circumcision?

2. Outraged Pharisees - 2:4-5

The Pharisees and their company were outraged. Paul writes of *false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage)*, who tried to see whether or not Titus was circumcised (Galatians 2:4). Paul further calls them *mutilators*, (Philippians 3:2 Amplified Bible).

Paul was ready for them and equal to their challenge. He didn't give in an inch. Was he fighting for his own cause or reputation? Not for a moment. In his words, *we did not yeild submission even for and hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you* (Galatians 2:5). Paul fought for his beloved Galatians, and for us today. You could write your name by *you*, for it was also for you and for me that Paul fought for the believers' freedom from the law. (See Ephesians 2:8,9; Titus 2:12).

3. Recognition of Paul's Ministry to Gentiles - 2:6-10

No amount of anyone's prestige, influence or status impressed or swayed Paul. He was committed to the establishment of faith in Christ as the sole requirement for justification. Truth prevailed. The differing ministries of Peter and Paul were both recognized by James, John and Peter. Paul and Barnabas were accepted fully by the Jerusalem Church which then commissioned them, in a sense, to go to the heathen, while Peter would go to the circumcision (Jews.) The decision was historic and Paul pledged his full cooperation to them (Galatians 2:10). Do you settle major differences as courageously yet cooperatively?

B. At Antioch - Galatians 2:11-14

1. Peter's Predicament - 2:11-13

When Peter visited Antioch he enjoyed the freedom given him by the Lord on the tanner's rooftop in Joppa. At that time, the Lord had introduced Peter to non-Kosher food as a means of conditioning him to minister to Gentiles (Acts 10). Peter freely ate Gentile food with the Gentile believers without compromising his apostleship one iota. Yet when some Jews came, claiming to be from James, he quickly moved to the Jewish table where the kosher food was. A little of Peter's old "play-it-safe" nature had surfaced momentarily.

2. Paul's Principle - 2:14

Paul could not let this pass, for it caused such an uproar that even Barnabas, being Jewish also, was unsure of the right position to take. Have you ever had people you love and respect take different sides of a key issue? Were you confused about who was right? That is how Barnabas felt.

Paul writes that when he saw the hypocrisy of the situation, he confronted Peter publicly. He asked Peter, *If you being a Jew, live in the manner of the Gentiles and not as the Jews, why do you compel Gentiles to live like Jews?* Paul presented the issue clearly and Peter needed to take a stand. As Boice says, "It is not enough merely to understand and accept the gospel, as Peter did, nor

even to defend it, as he did at Jerusalem. A Christian must also practice the gospel consistently, allowing it to regulate all areas of his conduct" ([A Commentary on Romans-Galatians](#) by James Montgomery Boice).

When you are in a tense situation due to basic differences of opinion, do you ask God to help you express the underlying truth so the differences can be resolved?

II. Church Council's Decision Concerning Gentiles - Acts 15

A. Acts 15 and Galatians 2

Is the same event described in Acts 15 and Galatians 2? The journey of Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem to present Titus may have been the same occasion as the First Church Council in Acts 15, or it may have preceded the Council or it could even have followed it. Scholars do not agree. If they are separate events they still concern the same dispute. It is possible that the trip of Paul and Barnabas and the presence of Titus became the test case that led to the assembling of the elders and apostles for the first church council to resolve the matter for the whole church.

B. Decision of the Council

1. The Dispute - Acts 15:1-6

Paul and Barnabas used the journey and the assembly of apostles to tell of the conversion of the Gentiles and to report *all things that God had done with them*. But the opposition of the Pharisees who believed caused such a dispute over Gentiles needing to keep the law of Moses and circumcision that the *apostles and elders came together to consider this matter* (Acts 15:6).

2. The Testimony of Peter and Paul - Acts 15:13-21

Peter then spoke of how God had chosen him to give the Gospel to the Gentiles at first, and how God gave them the Holy Spirit *just as He did to us* (Acts 15:8). He further said, *But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall save in the same manner as they* (Acts 15:11). Then Paul and Barnabas told the whole council, as they had told Peter, John and James in private, *how many miracles and wonders God had worked through them among the Gentiles* (Acts 15:12).

3. The Favorable Decision - Acts 15:13-21

The powerful words and prestige of Peter and Paul silenced the assembly. James, head of the Jerusalem church and the presiding elder, quoted the Old Testament prophet Amos who mentioned the inclusion

of the Gentiles (Amos 9:11-12). He then rendered his decision. *Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those from among the Gentiles who are turning to God, but that we write to them to abstain from things polluted by idols, from sexual immorality, from things strangled, and from blood.*

4. The Four Conditions

These four simple conditions would promote fellowship among Gentiles and Jews and make it easier for them to get along. Is fellowship with other Christians your goal? Are you willing to change your lifestyle and do without a few "pleasures" to make life better for someone near you?

III. Paul's Explanation of Justification by Faith - Galatians 2:15-21

A. Statement of the Proposition - Galatians 2:16-19

1. Justification by Faith Not Works - 2:16

Paul begins with the fact that converted Jews know that a person is not justified by the works of the law but know by experience that it is faith in Christ that brought them into right standing with God, which is justification, or being made just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned. Good works of the law are good, but they cannot wipe out bad works, which are sins, and so cannot make anyone blameless before God. Faith in Christ, however, can and does. Furthermore, no one could keep the law perfectly. No one ever did, except the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul quotes Psalm 143:2, *for in your sight, no one living is righteous.*

2. The Irrationality of Trying to Have Both - 2:17-18

"Couldn't they live with both views?" is a question only our philosophically naive age would ask. Opposing views cannot both be right. Paul's argument is a little involved but seems to go like this: if we believe our faith justifies us but yet put ourselves under a system where there is no escape from our sinfulness (the law), it makes Christ, our Saviour, inadequate to deliver us from sin, and so He becomes a minister of sinners rather than of justified saints. If we build up the law from which we have been delivered we make ourselves the transgressors for whom the law was given.

3. The Law as a Death Sentence - 2:19

Actually, Paul says, the law did him a favor when it pronounced him dead, for anyone who failed to keep it entirely, was worthy of death. So, through the law, he *died to the law* so he *might live to God*.

B. Summation of Justification by Faith Not Works - Galatians 2:20-21

1. Old Life Crucified - 2:20

Paul passionately proclaims the solution to the frustration of trying to keep a perfect law with no hope of doing so. *I have been crucified with Christ.* The old nature which was subject to the law of God was crucified with Christ. Even as He identified with us in our human life by being born a man, so we are identified with Him in His death for sin. Romans 6:6 says *Knowing this that our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with.*

2. New Life in Christ - 2:20

It is no longer I who live. Though the believer's old nature can actually be considered destroyed, the believer is not destroyed. By God's grace the believer goes on living, but it is a new life for it is Christ's life living inside. *And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God.* Still, we must live in the flesh which must be "reckoned" dead on a moment by moment basis. This is done by remembering that Christ *loved me and gave Himself for me*, to free me from those sins. While having less power over our lives than they once did, nevertheless, those sins trigger a response if we do not actively trust Christ for deliverance. Are you trusting Him fully and continually to deliver you from a life of sin?

3. Grace and Law Mutually Exclusive - 2:21

Paul says that it frustrates the grace of God to mix righteousness with lawkeeping. One Bible commentator says it "annuls" it. For the law could keep you from doing wrong if you kept it perfectly but it could not undo a wrong you may have done. This was where the grace of God must be your plea and that grace would be frustrated if you continued to plead your good behavior while trying to deal with God about your bad behavior.

Applications

1. Where are you frustrating God's grace by relying on some good you have done rather than agreeing with Him that without Him you are a helpless, hopeless sinner? Will you rest your faith in Christ to deliver you, not only from particular sins, but also from your sin nature?

2. Will you thank God for wiping clean your slate so that you are justified in His sight?

3. Will you be consistent in your walk of faith and not slip into legalism?

4. Will you do good works in order to please a holy God but not in order to appease Him?