**CONFRONTING HYPOCRISY**

**GALATIANS 2:1-14**

Last week we began our study of Galatians with a brief introduction and we discussed Paul’s defense of his apostleship and authority. These had come under attack by false teachers. In Chap 2 Paul will make it clear that the other apostles recognize his God-given authority and accept him as a fellow apostle.

To fully understand and appreciate Paul’s argument in Galatians Chap 2 we really need to get a little background from the Book of Acts. So before we delve into our passage let me do that.

Paul, previously known as Saul got saved on the Damascus Road. There he encountered the Lord Jesus Himself. You’re familiar with that event recorded in Acts Chap 9 (1-9). He was filled with the Holy Spirit (17) and began to preach Jesus in the synagogues (20-22), the places he was familiar with, had grown up in. At some point probably in Acts Chap 9 between verses 22 and 23 (though the Book of Acts does not specifically record it) Paul went away to Arabia where he was taught for 3 years presumably by the Lord Jesus Himself. Paul states in Gal 1:11-12: “For I would have you know, brothers, that the gospel that was preached by me is not man's gospel. For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ.” So it is in Arabia where Paul receives most of his knowledge of the Gospel and of Christ. He mentions this in Chap 1 (v 17), which we looked at last week.

After he returns from Arabia Paul visits the apostles in Jerusalem. He stays with Peter and is there for 15 days (Gal 1:18-19 and Acts 9:26-31). After this Paul relocates to the region of Syria. This is where the church at Antioch is located. Paul also spends time in Cilicia and his hometown of Tarsus. Paul and some others preach the Gospel message in this region. The result is that many Greeks (non-Jews) come to faith in Christ. Slowly this region and Antioch in particular begin to replace Jerusalem as the hotbed of Christianity. In Acts 11:26 we read, “And in Antioch the disciples were first called Christians.”

When the news reaches Jerusalem about how the church is growing in Syria and Cilicia, the church leaders in Jerusalem send Barnabas as their representative. By doing so they recognize that the movement in that area is indeed the work of God. Barnabas finds Paul and the two of them spend a year teaching the Christians at Antioch. About this same time a famine hits the entire region. The church in Antioch takes on a relief effort to help their brothers in Judea, which includes Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas carry the relief supplies to Jerusalem.

It’s after their return from Jerusalem in Acts 12 (v 25) that Paul and Barnabas set out on their first missionary journey together. This takes them to the region of Galatia (the churches he is writing to). At the conclusion of this approximately 3-year missionary effort, Paul and Barnabas travel to the Council at Jerusalem. They take Titus, a faithful uncircumcised Gentile believer who was from the island of Crete.

What was the Jerusalem Council and why was it convened (Acts 15:1-22). Christianity’s rapid growth in the First Century was due in large part to persecution, mostly by the Jews at first, later by the Romans. People were forced to leave their homes and relocate. Thus the Gospel message was being spread. Whereas at the very beginning most of the converts had been Jewish (Jerusalem, Judea, Perea, Galilee), now it is primarily the Gentiles who are embracing the Gospel (Syria, Galatia, Cilicia). It’s in this setting that dissension arises within the church body. It threatens to divide the church and damage the sweet fellowship that they’ve been enjoying. The issue at the center of great debate is the requirement by some that in order to be saved you not only had to have faith in Jesus Christ but you also had to be circumcised and embrace Judaism (celebrate the various feasts, keep the Jewish rituals, adhere to the food laws). To settle this divisive issue the Council at Jerusalem was convened.

What you need to understand is that by the time Paul travels back to Jerusalem for the Council, Acts Chap 15, he has been saved and preaching for 17 years. He’s already changed his name from Saul to Paul. He’s no longer a babe in Christ. He’s no longer a novelty. By this time he’s a seasoned veteran preacher of the Gospel with an established ministry. So Paul travels with Barnabas and Titus to the Jerusalem Council to discuss this very important issue. This is what Paul is referring to as we get into Galatians Chapter 2. I felt like you needed to know that background.

READ Galatians 2:1

It’s been 14 years since Paul’s initial meeting with the other apostles in Jerusalem (the 15-day visit mentioned in Galatians 1:18-19 and Acts 9:26-31) until he travel to the Council of Jerusalem (Acts Chapter 15).

READ Galatians 2:2-3

God revealed to Paul the need for him to go up to the Council at Jerusalem. There he met with some of the most respected leaders of the church (v 2, “those who seemed influential”) – this would be Peter, James, John and some of the other apostles. Paul did not go to have the apostles verify his message about the Gospel of grace. Rather, he went to get the endorsement for his ministry to the Gentiles. Paul met privately with them and his message – salvation by grace apart from keeping the works of the law – was affirmed by these men (see Acts 15:12).

Peter and the other apostles did not attempt to convince Titus that he needed to be circumcised. It was not a requirement to be a Christian. However, if you remember from last week’s lesson the requirement to be circumcised was at the heart of what the false teachers were claiming was necessary for salvation. Paul adamantly opposed this teaching and his position was backed up by the apostles at the Council of Jerusalem. This is very significant. The influence of Peter and the others gave Paul a great deal of credibility and it strengthened his position against those who were trying to undermine his ministry.

READ Galatians 2:4-5

Paul claims that the false teachers who had infiltrated the fellowship of believers in the region of Galatia were not simply deluded Christians, but “false brothers,” v 4. He says they were actually outsiders who infiltrated the ranks of the army of Christ. Their motive was to bring those under grace, those who are free in Christ, into bondage. That is what legalism does. Paul exposes them for what they are and refuses to give them the time of day. Paul brings the same degree of zeal for the Gospel message with him that he had been famous for before his conversion. He’s a fighter, a very strong-willed person. He’s passionate in his defense of the truth and he refuses to back down. The early church needed someone with Paul's fire and zeal to defend the truth against heretics, false teachers.

There are still those in the church today who hold to the false doctrine of legalism. These individuals attach requirements to Christianity that add to the doctrine of salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ. They hold fundamentally to personal opinions and non-doctrinal matters which have no biblical basis. They may be well meaning and believe they are somehow defending truth but they only divide the body. By doing so they undermine the primary mission of the church which is (great commission) A to reach others with the Gospel of Christ and B to make disciples.

READ Galatians 2:6

One of the things the false teachers had done is to exalt the 11 other apostles above Paul because of their earthly companionship with Jesus. They had been His original disciples. The false teachers denounced Paul because he had not been one of the original 12. What Paul is saying here is simply this: “It doesn't matter what kind of person they were or when they lived or what they did; God doesn't accept people on that basis. God plays no favorites.” Acts 10:34 says that "God show no partiality." God does not favor some over others on the basis of personal distinction, position, reputation or anything else.

READ Galatians 2:7-9

Please don't misunderstand what v 7 is saying. There is only ONE Gospel. Here the context is that the one Gospel message is being taken to two distinct groups of people. The apostles acknowledged, v 8, God's calling of Paul to bring the Gospel to the Gentiles, just as everybody recognized that Peter had been called to preach the Gospel to the Jews.

Notice that phrase in v 9, “the right hand of fellowship.” The Greek word for fellowship is *"koinonia."* It’s a noun and it means “partner.” This would have been a clear message to the false teachers. Paul is saying that the Jerusalem apostles took our hands and said, "Paul, you are partners in our work." Paul was accepted as an equal partner in the ministry. What a slam to the false teachers! Here Paul makes a strong case against them and they have no ground to stand on.

READ Galatians 2:10

The only request that the apostles made of Paul, which he was in complete agreement with, was that he remember to help the poor. The saints in Jerusalem were notoriously poor. Even though Paul would be working primarily with the Gentiles, the church leaders in Jerusalem wanted to make sure he didn't forget the poor Jewish Christians, especially those in Jerusalem.

By the way, do you realize that Paul spent much of his life gathering funds for the poor? In Paul's defense before Felix he mentions bringing alms to his nation, to the Jews (see Acts 24:17). In Romans 15:25-26, Paul talks about bringing a contribution that had been collected in Greece for the poor saints at Jerusalem. Then, in 1 Corinthians 16:1-3 Paul urges the Corinthian believers to collect money so that he could take their gift to Jerusalem.

The Bible is clear that it’s the responsibility of the church to care for the poor who are in need. An effective method of ministering to one's spiritual needs is to first help meet their physical needs. If we show people we care about their physical welfare, they are more likely to pay attention to what we say, be more open to the gospel.

There are several points of application in this section we have just looked at. First, Paul had a specific ministry. God called him to salvation and then He called him to serve. For those of us who name the name of Jesus Christ, who claim to be Christians, God has a ministry for us as well. Second, our faith is based on the authority of God's Word and it should be defended against those who seek to discredit it. That's what Paul did and that is what we should do. So, it is so important to know what you believe and why you believe it. Finally, notice the unity among the first Century believers. When an issue arose that threatened to split the body, they met and discussed and reached an agreement. What a lesson for those of us in the church today. One man doesn’t run the whole show and it’s OK to debate issues of disagreement agreeably.

Verses 11-16 talk about a confrontation that occurred been the two great apostles, Peter and Paul. It’s only mentioned here in Galatians and nowhere else in scripture. Luke chose not to record it in the book of Acts. We don't know exactly when this confrontation took place, but we know where – while Peter was visiting in Antioch. Why does Paul mention this confrontation that he had with Peter? It is to further refute the false teachers' charge that he, Paul, did not have apostolic authority. So here is an example he gives to show that he did…

READ Galatians 2:11-13

Peter did something that he should not have done and Paul, v 11, “opposed him to his face.” Paul confronted Peter about it. Now, what exactly did Peter do? Well, he had been eating with some of the Gentile believers, fellowshipping with them. [Remember that Peter, like Paul, had been raised a Jew and been converted to Christianity when he followed Jesus Christ's calling to be a disciple. Jews did not eat with Gentiles. They had very little to do with Gentiles. Well, in Acts Chapter 10 God gave Peter a vision on his roof top. He wanted Peter to go into the house of Cornelius, a Roman centurion and preach the gospel. Peter was convicted of his own prejudice against the Gentiles. God showed Peter that people are what is really important, not the keeping of religious legalism. Peter states in his own words in Acts 10:28: “You yourselves know how unlawful it is for a Jew to associate with or to visit anyone of another nation, but God has shown me that I should not call any person common or unclean.”] After this lesson Peter regularly ate with non-Jews as though they were part of his own family.

And Peter was doing pretty well until… some influential Jews arrived in Antioch from Jerusalem, representatives of James, the leader of the church in Jerusalem. When these men arrived in Antioch, Peter withdrew himself, disassociating himself from the Gentile Christians. Peter probably feared what his long-time Jewish friends would think of him. Today we call this “peer pressure.” Peter was such an influential person that others, including Barnabas began to be, v 13, “led astray by [his] hypocrisy.” Basically Paul calls Peter’s actions hypocritical.

This is a serious matter to Paul. By his actions Peter is implying that he is lending credence to the teaching of the false teachers that Christ was not sufficient for salvation; that you also must be a good Jew. Peter probably didn’t act this way intentionally to hurt anybody. He innocently thought that he was promoting unity by not offending the Jews and avoiding causing a big scene. Paul, however, sees it as quite damaging to the body of Christ. Peter should have known better than do this. Because of his influence, other Jewish believers might begin to act the same way toward the Gentile believers. Yes, even strong Christians in the faith, like Barnabas, can be misled. Paul views Peter's actions as harmful and a compromise of God's truth. So he confronts Peter about it.

There is a great lesson for us to learn here. A Christian church cannot be what it claims to be if there is any kind of racial or class distinctions that separate people, no matter what cultural factors are involved. That is why it has always confused me why Christians throughout history condoned the inhumane practice of slavery. The labels that men wear are absolutely irrelevant to God. To God, people are neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, rich nor poor, male nor female. We’re all sinners for whom Christ died. We have a responsibility to carry the gospel to all people. And once they come to Christ, they become our brothers and sisters. We’re all equal in God’s eyes. There is no room for prejudice in the body of Christ.

READ Galatians 2:14

“Hey Peter, you're not being consistent! You're not practicing what you're preaching! You're confusing the brethren!”

READ Galatians 2:15-16

There were two distinct groups at the center of this conflict. They are the “Jews by birth” and the "Gentile sinners.” The term "sinners," which Paul uses, was a Jewish term synonymous with Gentiles. But how did each of these two groups get saved? The same way. Paul tells us how, v 16: “by faith in Christ and not by works of the Law.” Paul is just reminding Peter of what he already knows and has been preaching boldly… that nobody is justified before God on the basis of works of the Law. There is really only one group that is a part of the unified body – those who believe, who follow Jesus Christ, by faith.

What was the result of Paul's rebuke of Peter? Peter became a giant in the church and he would later pen First Peter which emphasizes God's wonderful grace. He would later write Second Peter, where he warns of the dangers of false teachers. Peter learned these lessons first hand. There is practical application for all of us in these verses:

First, as human beings we are all fallible. Even after we get saved we can still make mistakes and slip back into worldly thinking. If it can happen to the great Apostle Peter, it can certainly happen to us. Second, our theology is only as significant as the life that backs it up. Peter's error was not in what he believed but in how he behaved as a result of that belief. Third, a small group can damage church fellowship, split a congregation. Fourth, the truth is more important than keeping peace. When a fellow believer acts unbecoming of their calling to Christ, and damages the ministry of the fellowship, they need to be confronted in truth and in Christian love. Fifth, don't compromise what you believe in order to be accepted by your peers. Stay committed to the truth no matter the personal cost. Finally, the way we behave can influence either negatively or positively those around us. SING hymn talking about being saved by grace.