



Galatians – Lesson 3

Paul Defends His Apostolic Gospel

Read Galatians 1:11-2:14

1. How does 1:11-12 logically *follow* 1:10 in Paul's line of thinking? What is he about to *defend*?

Paul asks (rhetorically!) in v. 10 whether his actions in bringing this issue up before the Galatians will win him the favor of men; is he doing this in order to become more “popular” or to gain more “human capital?” The answer to his question is found in the verses to follow: Paul insists that his actions *from the beginning of his new life in Christ* have been consistent in defending the true gospel *in spite of how others might view him*. In other words, Paul will argue now that he has *never* been a “people-pleaser,” but has always done everything out of a strong sense that the gospel of Jesus Christ needs to remain pure, and he has been called by Christ Jesus to *defend* that purity.

2. (a) How does Paul view his life *prior* to conversion (in 1:13-14)? *Why* does he point this out?

Paul admits that his life *prior* to the Damascus Road experience was one of *Jewish zealotness*, defending Judaism from that which he perceived as “threats” to its purity. This zealotness included (even!) persecuting the church *of which he was now a part*, a rather *ironic* twist in the path of his life. Paul *probably* brings this up because it demonstrates a *pattern*: he has *always* defended *vigorously* his religious beliefs, first as a Jew and *now* as a Christian.

- (b) How does Paul view his *conversion* (in 1:15-16a)? How does it align *with his gospel*?

Paul views his conversion as an act of *divine election*, having been “*set apart*” before he was even born, and an act of *pure grace*, whereby God, in his sovereignty, called him to Christ by revealing his Son unto him. In both senses, Paul sees his conversion as *an act of God*, something wrought in him by the power of God *for a specific purpose*; namely, to preach the gospel among the Gentiles (i.e., *away* from his own people). The *heart* of Paul's gospel, then, was the radical notion that salvation is *entirely of God*, purposed by him in eternity past, accomplished by him through the Son, and revealed by the Spirit as an act of pure grace. In other words, for Paul the Apostle, the gospel of Jesus Christ was a message of *divine action*, and not something accomplished through a “synergism” between God and the one being saved. Paul *could not* see anything in himself that had “helped” save him; he saw it as *entirely* a work of God (a monergism) that had altered his path and focus, from persecuting the church to being a part of it, and from defending Judaism to going “outside” of it to the Gentiles.

- (c) List some of the *doctrinal concepts* that he includes in recounting his encounter with Christ Jesus.

Paul includes *at least* the following doctrinal concepts in his conversion: 1) election, 2) effectual calling, and 3) regeneration. Paul saw his conversion as something *elect* by God “*before [he] was born*”, a calling (by grace) that *actually* produced conversion in him, and a (hint of) regeneration, whereby the fullness of the Son is revealed to him *such that he is able to understand*, something only possible by the regenerative work of the Spirit in a dead sinner.

3. (a) Sketch a *brief* timeline of Paul's life *after* his conversion (from 1:16-2:1). What is his *point* in replaying this personal history for the Galatians?

Paul's *post-conversion* life looks as follows: 1) after Damascus, he left from Antioch to go Arabia for a period of about three years (probably for additional training; vv. 16-17); 2) he then goes to Jerusalem for a visit with Peter (for about 15 days; vv. 18-20); 3) he is sent away to Tarsus (i.e., Syria and Cilicia; for the remainder of his training and to protect him from the Hellenists; v. 21); 4) he then returns to Antioch, making a trip with Barnabas to Jerusalem to meet with the leadership there (vv. 2:1-10); 5) he meets with Peter *again* (in Antioch; vv. 11-14); then 6) he heads out on the journey that brought him to Galatia (inferred at the end of 2:14). The *point* of this rehearsal is to show that he *never* was "subordinate" to any other *influential* leader of the church in terms of the gospel that he held to; the message that he delivered to the Galatians was *purely* from Jesus Christ himself, and was neither *validated* nor *corrected* by anyone "in power" in the church. It also served to demonstrate that Paul had been *thoroughly trained* in this gospel, both at home and in the churches of which he had been a part.

- (b) According to 2:2, *why* did Paul go up to Jerusalem? Who did he take with him *and why*?

Paul had received a *revelation* of the gospel, undoubtedly from Christ Jesus himself. It is *highly likely* that this revelation was an *unfolding understanding* of how the gospel of Jesus, a crucified and risen carpenter from Nazareth, could contain the reality of him being *also* the Son of God, and how all of that bore on how anyone could be right with God. He went to confer with the "influential" in Jerusalem (see 5a below), bringing Barnabas along with him (i.e., as a *witness* to the validity of his conversion *and message*). His goal was to be sure that he was not holding a gospel *contradicting* the message the church had *from the beginning*.

4. (a) Analyze Paul's argument from 2:3-5. What does it mean that some had "*slipped in to spy out our freedom*?"

Apparently, while Paul was in Jerusalem, he discovered some of the Judaizers were already working their "angle" in the church; Jewish influence would have been strong in Jerusalem "against" the gospel, and Paul discovers this reality when he goes there. Their purpose, Paul argues, was to "alter" the freedom at the heart of the gospel (see 4b below), which is *precisely* what Paul is now writing to the Galatians about.

- (b) What *specific* freedom is Paul referring to in his gospel? How is Titus a *test case* for this reality?

The *specific* freedom of the gospel is the freedom from *salvific ritual*, the need to "add" to faith in Christ Jesus certain Jewish rituals (common in Judaism) in order to be saved. The freedom of the gospel is the *liberation* of the believer from having to "jump through hoops" in order to "earn" the favor of God *alongside belief in Jesus*. Titus is a *test case* for this reality: by refusing to circumcise a *Gentile* follower of Christ, Paul is demonstrating that such ritualism *is unnecessary* in order to be a Christian. And, since no one at Jerusalem *insisted* that Titus be circumcised, the issue was clear of the relationship between Jewish ritual and the gospel.

- (c) List some of the *freedoms* that Christians enjoy under the gospel (see also Chapter 21 of the 1689 Second London Baptist Confession of Faith for more possibilities).

The Confession lists a number of *liberties* that Christians enjoy in the gospel: 1) freedom from the guilt of sin; 2) freedom from the condemning wrath of God (now and in eternity); 3) freedom from the curse of the law (i.e., having to keep the law *perfectly* in order to be saved); 4) deliverance from this present evil world (i.e., freedom from the dominion of sin, bondage to Satan); 5) freedom from the evil of afflictions (i.e., having *purpose* in suffering); 6) freedom from the fear of death; 7) free access to God; and 8) the freedom to serve God not out of "slavish fear", but out of a child-like love and willing mind.

5. (a) Name some of the “*influential*” ones Paul addressed in Jerusalem (2:6-10). What did they *change* in Paul’s gospel? *Why*?

The influential ones Paul addressed in Jerusalem would *undoubtedly* have been the other Apostles, specifically Peter and John (v. 9), along with James, the half-brother of Jesus who was (by this time) the head of the church in Jerusalem. These were all influential because they had been *in the presence* of Jesus during his public ministry, at his crucifixion, and witnesses to his resurrection. As it turns out, they changed *nothing* in Paul’s gospel, even though Paul had been commissioned to take this gospel to the Gentiles, whereas Peter had seen his mission as to the Jews. Nothing in what Paul had come to understand about the gospel *during his time in Tarsus* contradicted what the *original* apostles had gleaned from Christ himself.

- (b) How does Paul *contrast* himself with Peter? Why is that an *important* contrast (to Paul)?

Paul contrasts himself as the Apostle to the Gentiles, whereas Peter was the Apostle to the Jews. This contrast is important because it implies that the *gospel was the same to either group*. Namely, that salvation for the Jew and salvation for the Gentile *was identical*: trust in the completed work of Christ Jesus by faith and receive the righteousness of God *by that faith alone* (Romans 1:16-17).

6. Briefly sketch the reason *why* Paul confronted Peter at Antioch (2:11-14)? Why was this confrontation *essential* to Paul’s understanding of the gospel?

Paul was *forced* to confront Peter later because Peter had *wavered* on the issue of Jewish ritualism within the gospel. When he first came to Antioch, he would eat willingly with the non-Jewish believers, but when some of the “circumcision party” (i.e., the Judaizers) showed up, he drew back from his fortitude, and began to act as though they “had a point.” Paul confronted him on this because he had *already* received the “*right hand of fellowship*” in his gospel, and he knew that Peter was compromising, something that could have spelled disaster for the purity of the gospel, had it been allowed to continue. If Peter had been allowed to continue in this compromise, the message of *faith alone in Christ alone* at the heart of the gospel would have been damaged, and it might have spelled the end of the church itself, over time.