

Lesson 25 - The Dispensation of Grace--Part 3

In this lesson we will study the first ten verses in Galatians chapter two. Again, we will study in some detail since this passage will be very helpful in understanding the current dispensation.

Paul's independence from the Jerusalem Church

We can better understand chapter two of Galatians if we first look back briefly into chapter one. This will help us to understand the context of the verses we will study in chapter two. Please read Galatians chapter one. Take notice of how Paul is seeking to establish his independence from the twelve apostles. Speaking of his gospel, he writes in verse 12: "For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." Paul did not receive his gospel from the twelve apostles. In verse 17 he writes: "Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus." We can see how Paul is emphasising that he did not immediately go to spend time with the twelve apostles after his conversion. Finally, in verse 22 he writes: "And was unknown by face unto the churches of Judea which were in Christ." Paul is establishing the fact that he spent very little time in Jerusalem (where the twelve apostles were). The churches in Judea did not even know what Paul looked like.

Galatians 2:1-10

Verses 1-2

"Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also. 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, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain."

Paul begins chapter two by telling about a trip he took to Jerusalem.

Apparently there were some who were saying that Paul was under the authority of the twelve apostles and that he had gone to Jerusalem to submit to their authority. However, the ones who were making such statements were false teachers. Paul tells us that he "went up by revelation." He did not go to Jerusalem because the twelve apostles said he should do so. He went to Jerusalem because Jesus Christ told him to go. His trip to Jerusalem did not suggest any position of subjection to the twelve apostles.

Some people suppose that Paul went to Jerusalem so that the twelve apostles could teach him. This, also, is false. Paul writes: "I . . . communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles." He went to inform the twelve apostles concerning his gospel, not to learn from them. Paul taught the twelve, rather than being taught by them.

Some commentators falsely claim that Paul went to Jerusalem to check with the twelve apostles to make sure that his gospel was the same as their gospel. This is not true! Paul writes that he went "privately to them, which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain." When Paul arrived in Jerusalem, he went privately to Peter, James, and John. Paul was not worried that he was preaching a different (or wrong) gospel. He knew that his gospel was different from the gospel preached by the twelve and he

knew it was the true gospel for this dispensation. His concern was that the Jewish believers might reject his gospel. This would cause much trouble for Paul in his ministry. He was concerned that his preaching would then be "in vain." If the Jerusalem church and the twelve apostles opposed Paul, it would turn many people away from the gospel of grace.

Verses 3-5

"But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised: And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage: To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

Why did Paul bring Titus with him to Jerusalem? This was a very bold move because Titus was an uncircumcised Gentile. There was a controversy concerning circumcision (the Law) and Paul's gospel of grace. Titus would serve as a test case as to whether Paul was willing to agree that circumcision should be required of the Gentiles. By bringing Titus, Paul was making certain that this issue would be at the forefront of his visit. Would the Jews force Paul to be subject to them and their gospel by circumcising Titus?

Paul's arrival in Jerusalem set up a contest between the demands of the false brethren and the truth of Paul's gospel. Paul could have simply said that he did not believe circumcision was a major issue. What harm would it do if Paul just went along with the wishes of the Jews? This would have avoided a confrontation. However, Paul refused to compromise the gospel of grace by submitting to the Law. In Galatians 5:2-3 Paul taught that the person who submits to circumcision becomes obligated to keep the whole law.

The gospel of grace would then become meaningless (vain). Paul and Titus refused to give up their liberty in Christ and be placed under the bondage of the Law. Thankfully, Paul was faithful to his gospel "that the truth of the gospel might continue with you."

Verse 6

"But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me:"

Peter, James, and John were the ones "who seemed to be somewhat." They had a great reputation as the leaders of the Jerusalem church. However, these great apostles were lacking some knowledge. They were not yet informed concerning the gospel revealed to Paul. Peter, James, and John had a greater reputation than Paul, but they fell short of Paul in knowledge.

Paul was not impressed with men ("whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me"). He says that Peter, James, and John "in conference added nothing to me." They did not teach Paul anything new or change Paul's doctrine in any way. Paul knew that the twelve apostles needed to be taught by him. So meantime after this conference in Jerusalem, Paul rebuked Peter publicly and face to face (Galatians 2:11-14). Peter, James, and John needed to hear Paul's gospel and submit to his authority as "the apostle of the Gentiles" (Romans 11:13).

Verses 7-8

"But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter; (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)"

In verse six we learned that Peter, James, and John did not add anything to Paul (did not teach him new truths or change his gospel). Now Paul says "But contrariwise." On the contrary, Paul did add something to the Jerusalem apostles. Paul taught them about the revelation of the mystery that he received from Jesus Christ (Romans 16:25-26; Colossians 1:24-26). These apostles of great reputation had to become Paul's students and learn about the new dispensation given to him.

As the apostles talked, it became clear to Peter, James, and John that God had given Paul a new gospel. The gospel of the circumcision had been given to Peter and now a different gospel, the gospel of the uncircumcision, was given to Paul. Though many teach that there is only one gospel in the Bible, we can see that that is not true. The gospel that Paul preached was different from the gospel that Peter preached.

The apostles also recognised that Peter and Paul had different apostleships. Peter had an apostleship of the circumcision. Paul had an apostleship to the Gentiles.

Verses 9-10

"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; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision. Only they would that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do."

Finally, the apostles understood that there were, also, two different commissions. Peter, James, and John would now go to the circumcision and Paul would go to the heathen. The apostles made a formal agreement with one another ("they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship").

After this agreement, the Jerusalem apostles had one request for Paul. They asked him to remember, in his ministry, the needs of the poor saints in Jerusalem. It is important to note that Peter, James, and John had no authority to command Paul to do this. They could only make a request to him. Paul writes, "the same which I also was forward [eager] to do." Paul complied with their request, not out of submission, but willingly. He already had this need in mind. Thus, even in this request, the Jerusalem apostles did not add anything new to Paul's gospel or commission.

The apostles all recognized that there were:

- a) Two different gospels;
- b) Two different apostleships; and
- c) Two different commissions.

We, also, must recognise this truth if we are going to understand the Bible and live according to God's will. Understanding and holding to the gospel given to Paul is the key to sound Bible doctrine and a victorious walk with the Lord.

[In the next lesson we will learn about the conclusion of the dispensation of grace.]

Review Questions Lesson 25 - The Dispensation of Grace--Part 3

True or False

1. In Galatians chapter one, Paul emphasises his independence from the twelve apostles.
2. Paul writes in Galatians chapter two about a trip he took to Rome.
3. Paul went to Jerusalem to make certain that he was preaching the same gospel that Peter was preaching.
4. Paul brought Titus with him to Jerusalem so that Titus could be circumcised.

Multiple Choice

5. In Galatians 2:6 Paul wrote about those "who seemed to be somewhat." He was referring to:
 - a) Peter, James, and John
 - b) Moses and Elijah
 - c) The Old Testament prophets
 - d) False teachers
6. Paul had a conference with Peter, James, and John. The result of their meeting was:
 - a) Peter, James, and John taught the gospel to Paul
 - b) The apostles became angry with one another and refused to come to an agreement
 - c) Peter, James, and John added nothing to Paul's gospel
 - d) Paul changed his teaching so that it would match the gospel that Peter preached
7. Paul informed the Jerusalem apostles about:
 - a) The real meaning of the Old Testament
 - b) The gospel given to him by revelation of Jesus Christ
 - c) The gospel of the kingdom
 - d) The Second Coming of Christ

Fill in the Blanks

8. Peter and Paul were both apostles, but they had _____ apostleships.
9. The apostles agreed together that there were two different gospels, apostleships, and _____.
10. An understanding of the gospel given to _____ is necessary in order to please God and know His will for today.