

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS ON PAUL'S LETTER TO THE GALATIANS - PART 3

To confirm his passionate plea to the Galatians to hold on to the true gospel, which is revealed by God, rather than to false gospels, Paul illustrates first from his own experience of revelation in chapter one, and then of confirmation that he was on the right track in chapter two.

This second chapter provides two remarkable answers to the question of why God revealing Himself to us directly does not lead to division and error. Some 16 or 17 years after Jesus first revealed Himself to Paul, he went again to the mature Christians in Jerusalem to review his teaching with them, 'for fear I might be running, or had run in vain.' Why after so many years of study, growth and ministry did Paul finally ask others to comment on his message? Surely if his message had been revealed from heaven there was no need.

The background to this visit is described in Acts 15. After their fruitful ministry in Antioch and then Cyprus and Galatia, Paul and Barnabas' work was being undermined by Jewish Christians insisting that new Gentile believers should now keep the Jewish law. Paul and Barnabas begin by debating the issue with them in Antioch but it remains unresolved.(Acts 15:2) Instead of allowing the problem to fester and divide the church, they make the visit to Jerusalem, determined that the question should be settled. Acts 15:2,7 describe a process of 'debate'. The Greek word means 'to seek together' rather than the modern practice of fighting bitterly from opposite corners. 'Seeking together' demands a humble, open heart to God and each other with an open Bible before us. It is in that spirit they go back to Jerusalem. The outcome is thrilling. Instead of rivalry and division there is a unity in the gospel of grace which is to last for many years.(Acts 15:22-29)

It takes a deep confidence in the path on which God has led us to expose ourselves to others in a true attitude of seeking. It is a mark of true strength, not weakness, to be genuinely open to listen to another point of view.(I Pet.3:15) In Prov.27:17 we are told 'as iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another.' No blade grows sharper unless it is exposed to another blade or a stone. 'The word of God is ... sharper than any two edged sword'(Heb.4:12) but to be effective it needs regularly to be sharpened. The debate needed to be practical as well as theoretical. Titus, a Gentile believer, provides a suitable test case and is accepted.(2:1-6)

The resulting unity in the gospel of grace allows them to recognise that they have been given different ministries to different people. Their preaching will not be uniform in presentation or method yet at heart they will be the same. This allows them to be enthusiastic supporters of each other's work. Our practical expression of the gospel to every group must include a concern for the poor. This priority crosses all cultural lines.(2:7-10)

The second half of the chapter seems at first sight to contradict all that has gone before. When on a later occasion Peter visits Antioch, Paul sees Peter doing wrong so he rebukes him but he does it in public! How can that be reconciled with what has already been taught? The problem is exactly the one they have been debating, in which Peter has agreed with Paul. Out of fear of the religious rule makers, Peter follows the Old Testament Law by eating only with Jews. Does it matter? Yes it does. To ignore what is happening would have been to undermine all the debate which has taken place and the unity which has been achieved. This was not a matter of personal wrong to be dealt with in private.(Matt.18:15) It was an issue of false teaching which has to be addressed openly. It was misleading to others, even mature Christians like Barnabas. It could soon take over their whole approach to the Christian life.(5:8; 2:11-14)

Paul's response is not to correct Peter's behaviour but to bring him back to the message on which they have, over many years, agreed. He reminds him of the gospel. There is only one way to be saved, through faith in Christ, not through keeping the Law. To start by faith and then to go back to rules is to make nonsense of the cross. We died with Christ on the cross to our own self effort so that we might in future have Him live within us. There is only one way; don't spoil it Peter! And Peter obviously responds with humble appreciation to Paul's iron sharpening his. We can fearlessly do as Paul does and respond as Peter does.(2:15-21)

Having admitted that both he, before he was a Christian, and Peter more recently have made the same mistake of trying to live by the Old Testament law, Paul turns again to the Galatians' problem, their 'different gospel' in chapter three. Just what is wrong with adding a few useful rules to our saving faith?

Look again at your titles for chapter two. You may have some more focussed ideas after studying it in detail. Now divide chapter three and title each section. Seek an overall theme for the whole chapter. Notice especially the words and phrases which keep recurring. My suggestions are as follows: verses 1-5; 6-9; 10-14; 15-22; 23-29.

#### Section 1 - (3:1-5)

Q.1 What had the Galatians done to deserve being called 'foolish'? Was he right to call them foolish in the light of Matt.5:22? How does God define a fool? (Ps.53:1) How could that definition apply to their situation?

Q.2 How does Paul explain their mistake to them? What ordinary everyday illustrations can you think of that would demonstrate how illogical their position was?

Q.3 How had Jesus Christ been 'publicly portrayed as crucified' before their eyes? How can this still be done today? (II Cor.4:10; Gal.6:17)

#### Section 2 - (3:6-9)

Q.4 Paul now begins a series of illustrations from the life of Abraham to prove his point. To what two events in Abraham's life is he referring in this section? (Gen.12:3; 15:5-8) How do these events support Paul's argument in Galatians?

#### Section 3 - (3:10-14)

Q.5 To explain his message further, Paul takes his readers through a number of Old Testament references to the Law. (Deut.27:26; Hab.2:4; Lev.18:5; Deut.21:23) Look each one up in its context. What together do they say about living by the Law, its consequences and God's solution to the problem the Law creates?

Q.6 What was God's real purpose in giving us the Law? How had the Jews misunderstood this? What did Jesus do about our position under the Law? For what purpose? How is this good news to, for example, an alcoholic who beats his wife and neglects his children?

#### Section 4 - (3:15-22)

Q.7 God made a legal agreement with Abraham? What was it? How did the giving of the Law 430 years later change what God had promised? Why was the Law necessary?

Q.8 Explain verse 19 in your own words. How did both the promise given to Abraham and the Law given to Moses prepare us for the coming of Christ? How can we make this meaningful to someone living today who knows nothing of the Bible?

Q.9 Why does Paul give so much importance to the word 'seed' being singular rather than plural?

#### Section 5 - (3:23-29)

Q.10 What illustration does Paul use now to show the role of the Law? How does knowing God's standard help us to become Christians? How can we apply this idea to evangelising those who have not been brought up to know the Bible?

Q.11 List all the results in verses 26-29 of faith in Christ. What does it mean to be 'baptised into Christ'? (I Cor.12:13) In what sense are we Abraham's offspring? How should this section change our relationships with those who have a different race, social position or gender from us?