



Galatians 2:6-10

This Study Paper contains the following :-

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Introduction to the passage

The leaders of the Jerusalem church had accepted Titus as a Christian without the need for circumcision. Paul now reports, in brief, the outcome of the Council of Jerusalem. The full details are found in Acts 15:6-31. Paul restricts himself to two main points: the authenticity of the gospel that he had been preaching (the same gospel the Galatians had heard) and the fact that all the leaders were united behind this gospel, demonstrated by the shaking of hands.

What these verses mean

Verse 6

As for those who seemed to be important — whatever they were makes no difference to me;

Paul is referring to the leaders of the Jerusalem church. He is not being disrespectful, for in verse 9 he describes these same men as pillars. What Paul is doing is emphasising that natural and physical circumstances are never to be thought more important than spiritual experience. Church leaders are to be respected if they are faithful but they are only mere mortal beings, sinful and weak. When Peter wrote his epistle, he warned elders not to lord it over the flock that is entrusted to them

(1 Pet.5:3). Remember the context of this letter. Paul is addressing people who have blindly followed false teachers. It is important for Paul to stress to these Galatians that we do not put our trust in men, no matter how famous they are and what position they hold; God's truth overrides.

"In matters of society, God will have us honour and reverence persons, as His instruments by which He governs the world. But when the question touches religion, conscience, faith, the fear of God, we must not fear persons, put no trust in them; for we must trust and glory in God alone." *Martin Luther writing on Galatians 2:6.*

God does not judge by external appearance —

The way we assess people is very much by external characteristics. There is a natural tendency in our hearts to follow certain personalities and idolise them. This is common in the Christian Church today, when some preachers have a following as if they were film stars. God's criterion is different. See the words God spoke to Samuel when he was to anoint David to be the next king of Israel after Saul (1 Sam. 16:7). This principle continues into the New Testament as God gives leaders to his church (Eph. 4:11-16).

those men added nothing to my message.

The Council of Jerusalem confirmed that the gospel Paul had been preaching was the apostolic gospel, even though no apostle had instructed him in it. This was because Paul received his knowledge of the gospel in a glorious encounter with God; nothing on earth can have more authority over him than that. Compare 1 Samuel 16:7; Matthew 22:16; Acts 4:19,20.

Verse 7

On the contrary,

Those who had troubled Paul's Galatian converts had insisted that Christians must keep Jewish ceremonial law. Compare 1:7; 3:1-5; Acts 15:1. On the contrary, says Paul, when I went to Jerusalem the apostles there made no rule such as the false brethren are trying to impose. So the false brethren are not true messengers.

they saw that

I had been given the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been given the task of preaching the gospel to the Jews. Paul recognised that God used Peter as a preacher in a remarkable way – see Acts 2:41. Paul claims that God has used him as a preacher also in a remarkable way – see Acts 15:12. God worked equally greatly through both Peter's and Paul's ministries. On the basis of that evi-

dence, Paul says, the Jerusalem elders agreed that Paul's gospel was the true gospel. Again, the false brethren are hereby exposed as frauds.

Verse 8

For God,

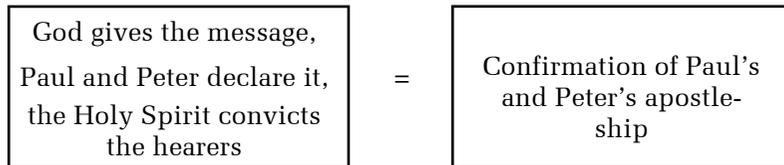
who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews,

[circumcised]

was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles.

[uncircumcised]

There were not two gospel messages. The distinction is only in the areas in which the message was preached – Peter mainly to the Jews; Paul mainly to Gentiles. There was no difference in the content of the messages. The word “gospel” has only one meaning in both cases – see 1:6–9; Ephesians 4: 4 – 6. The message was from God and this was seen in the way men and women were being changed in their lives, through repenting of their sin and trusting in Christ (faith). This was as a result of the Holy Spirit's working in the lives of these people. Hence this formula;



Verse 9

James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars,¹

Compare Revelation 3:12. The symbol of a building as a picture of the church of God is common in the New Testament. See Ephesians 2:20 – 22. Peter, James (probably the Lord's brother) and John were recognised as important to the wellbeing of the church. Peter, James, John and Paul wrote at least 21 of the 27 New Testament books and Peter probably helped Mark write that Gospel as well. Pillars of the church of God, truly!

¹ It is interesting to see how the gospel message united people of very different characters in the one early church, as indicated by verse 9 above. James, the Lord's brother, the conservative traditionalist, Peter, the impetuous, eager, practical man, Paul, the great thinker, yet a blazing evangelist, John, the quiet disciple, full of gentle love, yet with prophetic vision to write Revelation, Barnabas, the caring negotiator and encourager of others. The spiritual experience each of them possessed made it possible to combine all their different gifts in one harmonious fellowship. This illustrates how the life of Christ in believers can unite them.

gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognised the grace given to me.

This was the sign of agreement and of solemn covenant. They were all uniting behind one gospel but sharing the fields of labour. Giving the right hand often indicated that an agreement was made. See 2 Kings 10:15; 1 Chronicles 29:24 (submit = give the hand); Ezra 10:19; Ezekiel 17:18. It was a remarkable moment when Peter, James, John, Paul and Barnabas all shook hands together. It was a sign of complete agreement that the one gospel would go to all peoples.

They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

They agreed that this should happen. This was not an unhappy compromise but an arrangement for enthusiastic support of each other. Thus Paul and Barnabas are to give their main energies to reaching Gentiles, Peter, James and John to reaching Jews. (N.B. Always remember this when reading their respective letters in the New Testament). Nevertheless, Paul sometimes spoke to Jews and Peter sometimes spoke to Gentiles.

Verse 10

All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor,

Martin Luther wrote: “Where the church is there must needs be the poor. For the world and the devil do persecute the church and bring many to poverty.” The verb “remember” is in the present tense in the Greek; i.e. “keep on remembering”. Paul had begun to do this (Acts 11:29 –30). Judaea often suffered from famines and Jewish Christians would receive least help from the Jewish authorities.

the very thing I was eager to do.

Paul was eager and diligent to carry on with the ministry for the poor. Compare Acts 24:17; Romans 15:25; 1 Corinthians 16:1 – 3; 2 Corinthians 8: 1 – 4. Whilst the gospel of free grace does not require or involve any human contribution (i.e. works or good deeds), the consequence of the gospel upon a person is that good works should flow out of that person's changed life. Paul, having been a persecutor of God's people, has been saved from eternal death by the very one he persecuted. He has not deserved God's gracious love that has rescued him, but the effect it has upon him is that he wants to please God by living in such a way that God is glorified. Paul in his letter to the Ephesians says, “For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works . . .” (Eph.2:10).



Summary

The gospel message these Galatians had heard from Paul was not man-made but had come from God. To stress this fundamental principle, Paul has been showing these Galatians that he had not been taught by the other apostles. He was taught by Jesus in the wilderness of Arabia. When Paul did finally meet the other leaders of the church, the meeting took place in Jerusalem against a background of some who were wanting to return to the old ways of Judaism. What transpired at this special meeting (Council of Jerusalem) was that the gospel Paul had been teaching was the same gospel proclaimed by the other apostles. This was that believers in Christ are justified by their faith and that the requirements of the law of Moses did not apply. The message was the same but there was an agreement as to the division of the work. Paul was to concentrate his work amongst the Gentiles whilst Peter stayed with the Jews. The gospel meets the needs of people, no matter how diverse are their languages and culture.



Summary note on the letter so far

So far in this letter Paul shows that it is not he who is presenting a false gospel. He is preaching what he received from God (chapter 1) and what the elders at Jerusalem agreed was the true gospel (chapter 2). It must therefore be the Galatians who are deserting the gospel, being misled by false teachers.



A suggestion of what to preach about from these verses

“Remember the poor” – 2:10

Introduction.

True Christianity means living according to Bible teaching and not according to what other people may say or do. So what is the Bible teaching about the right attitude to those who are poor?

1. **There will always be poor in the world** (John 12:8).

Injustice, oppression, deceit, bribery, ill-health, laziness, carelessness, inequality of ability and opportunity, drought, famine, civil disorder,

war – all these cause poverty; all are the result of humanity being out of fellowship with God; all will last as long as this sinful earth remains. There will always be the poor because society will never be sinless.

(Those who are the poor in this life are not so because of some wrongdoing in a previous life. God has established only one way of dealing with human sin and that is by the death of Christ. The Hindu doctrine of Karma is not the reason for the presence of the poor).

2. **God in the Bible is often shown as a defender of the poor because he is against all the injustice which produces poverty.**

This does not mean that God is always against rich people (see Deuteronomy 8:18; Ecclesiastes 5:19). Abraham, Job, David, Solomon, Nicodemus, Joseph of Arimathea and other Bible characters were wealthy. The Bible does not denounce wealth but only wealth unjustly gained or wrongly used.

The Bible does **not** teach that the poor of this world have some special merit in God’s sight. The poor and the rich are equally spiritually dead in God’s sight; each equally needs God’s grace.

3. **The church is a society of saved sinners who should always seek to alleviate poverty** (6:10).

- a. In daily life believers must not themselves act in those ways which produce poverty in society but will always seek to support honesty and justice in public life.
- b. In church life believers must show love to one another by giving help to one another as necessary. See Acts 4:34 – 35 and 2 Corinthians 8:1 – 14. This does not mean it is wrong for believers to have their own possessions (Acts 5:4); it is only wrong to use possessions selfishly or deceitfully.

4. **It does not truly help the poor if only their physical needs are met while their spiritual needs are ignored** (Luke 12:20 – 21).

A class war in society is not the cure for poverty because such revolutions do not remove the power of sin from people’s lives. A society can only be changed by the people in it being born again. Therefore the poor always need the gospel message as much as (if not more than) they need material help.

Conclusion

In Psalm 73 Asaph begins by being envious of the ungodly rich (verses 1 – 16) but later realises that it is better to be **spiritually** wealthy (verses

17 – 28). Therefore to “remember the poor” must include giving them spiritual understanding as well as physical help. Are we, as individuals and as churches, truly remembering the poor in the way the Bible teaches?

 **Focus point:**
Justification by Faith

Justification **means** that a person is treated by God as

- (a) free from all wrongdoing
- (b) possessing perfect righteousness

Such a person is seen as having kept all God’s laws perfectly. They enjoy God’s full favour and blessing.

The Bible uses the word *justification* in a legal sense. When a person is justified, it means that God treats that person, who is guilty of sin, as being not guilty. The person is not made righteous but what it means is that the person is viewed by God as legally righteous. For example, the fact that a person is found “not guilty” in court does not change what actually happened. The court, on the basis of the evidence before it may have found such a person “not guilty”, but the person may still have done the crime.

The Bible describes **two methods** of justification.

- (a) By obedience to God’s command.
This was the case with Adam and Eve when they were first created.
This method is suitable for those people who are already holy and sinless.
- (b) However, since Adam and Eve fell into sin, it has been impossible for mankind to be justified by obedience.
 - When they disobeyed, God spoke to Adam and Eve (Gen.3:14-16).
 - God was to take justification into his own hands.
 - He would send a Saviour, born of a woman to rescue sinners from Satan.

This was God’s mercy (withholding punishment we deserve) and grace (giving us what we don’t deserve), which is the second method of justification. Hence we have the phrase “to be justified by [God’s] grace”.

Justification in the Old Testament

Adam and Eve had received a promise of a Saviour. They were aware

of mixed feelings, a dread of God because of their disobedience at the same time as having a hope in God’s promise of a rescue/deliverance. These feelings were expressed in animal sacrifices to God.

The animal was innocent, yet was killed as a substitute for sinners. Men did not invent these sacrifices, but they were initiated by God. God was illustrating the way that man was to be rescued. A person has to believe in God’s way of salvation which is the death of an innocent substitute. The person who believes in this substitute is justified. This belief is faith. A person who rejects this way remains under God’s judgement for his sin.

In the Old Testament, the people did not fully understand how a substitute would come (the Messiah) but the pattern had been provided through sacrifices and the way God dealt with his people e.g. Noah, Abraham. These sacrifices showed the people, in symbolic form, the work of Jesus Christ as Saviour. God also sent prophets to give the people more information about the coming of the Saviour.

Justification through Jesus

Jesus came down to this earth at the time God appointed just as all the prophets had foretold. Jesus was without sin; he was righteous and he gave his life when he did not deserve to be punished. So he was able to act as a substitute. The Christian’s justification depends on that righteousness, there is nothing else. That righteousness is credited to the one who trusts and believes in Christ’s death as his salvation.

A comment on the word *faith*. The phrase *justification by faith* can give the impression that it is our faith that justifies us. We are justified by Christ’s righteousness. Faith is the means by which we receive that righteousness. Faith is a gift from God (2 Pet.1:1). For example, food nourishes our bodies. We take in the food by eating it. Is it the eating that nourishes our bodies? No, the eating [faith] is the means by which we put the food into our bodies.

Many people have a problem with the teaching of justification.

The **first group** is the rationalist. The rationalist will only believe if you can prove something to him. The rationalist is in error because he is ignorant of the demands God places upon us.

The **second group** is the ritualist. The ritualist is satisfied only when a ceremony or ritual is performed. The ritualist supposes that it is the ceremony that pleases God but such a person is in error because he has no proper sense of his own sin and guilt. He is unable to appreciate the

excellence of what Christ has done. This was the problem for the Jews who were troubling the Galatian believers. Many sections of Christendom today are ritualistic, e.g. Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches.



Over to you

How much does external appearance or holding important position matter in your culture? How does that then fit with verse 6?

When people are affected by a message you have preached, how would you explain why they have been so moved?

Do you think that preaching which is not gospel-based can be accompanied by the power of the Spirit?