

Galatians Chapter 2

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If I asked you to state the Gospel message in a few thoughts, what would you say? What if there was a person in the same room who gave a false presentation? Could you tell them they're wrong? Of course I realize we're saved by faith alone. I'm asking, does God care if we stand up for Him? That is what He calls us to do as believers, be a living witness for Him! Moments in life do come when we should take a stand for Jesus. We don't do it for salvation's sake although I'm sure how we act as a Christian affects our eternal destiny in terms of heavenly rewards! What if I'm scared or messed up? Learn from it, let it go and hopefully do better the next time! The more you know and trust in "the truth", the easier it is to be bold for Jesus when "the moneys on the line". That's one thing that impressed me about the "12": When they got threatened with torture and death, they didn't deny that Jesus was God, or deny the fact He rose from the dead. Just saying, if our eternal rewards are on the line, it's amazing how we'd come through. There's a famous saying, "People are like teabags, you never know what flavor they are until they are put in in hot water!"

As I assume most of you know, Paul the apostle (not one of the original 12) wrote Galatians. This book may be the oldest biblical epistle in time order. Paul wrote it probably after his first missionary journey where he was sent as a missionary from his home church in Antioch (in Syria today), and traveled west to what is Turkey today. He discovered the churches he founded there (in a region called Galatia) were going through moments of doubts about exactly what is and what is not the Gospel message. This book in effect is a message on what is the Gospel and what exactly does it mean to be saved by faith in Jesus alone! Let me explain the problem and how it affects us today! At that time in Galatia, some converts from Judaism to Christianity believed that non-Jewish Christians needed to keep all the Jewish laws to be saved! The issue for those Jewish people in effect was, "If anyone can be saved just by stating their faith that Jesus is God and rose from the dead, what'll happen to the Jewish nation? Will there still be a purpose for Israel if people are just saved by faith? Yes it has a future purpose! Romans 11 pounds that home! Anyway, when Paul wrote this, Jewish Christians were working their way through the churches in Galatia to state that Paul was wrong! They falsely taught one had to be Jewish to be saved!

I'm well aware I'm preaching to the choir here! I know that almost all of us reading this already believe we're saved by faith alone and the purpose of doing "good works" is to be a good witness for Jesus. It's not a salvation issue whether we steal or murder, but let's be honest we could go to prison as well as be a bad witness for Jesus by doing that! To quote one of my former pastors, "I drink alcohol as much as I want and smoke cigarettes all that I want! The issue is how much do I want to?" It's easy for any of us to think I do "this or that" for Jesus, God must be really proud of me!" Again, we must remember we're saved by faith alone. Good works may (key word) earn us eternal rewards if we have the right attitude about them, but it's got nothing to do with our salvation! Unfortunately, much of the Christian world in the broad sense, believes we're saved by faith AND our works! Most of us know that's wrong. When I hear people argue they're going to heaven because of this or that work, I'll state the truth of what is the Gospel message.

All of that leads back to Chapter 2 of this book. The key word in this book is "faith" as in those who're saved are strictly saved by faith alone! You may think, "OK then, I'm saved because I believe that so I can go do whatever I want now that I believe that! You're missing the point: God didn't call us live any way we feel like it! Being free from the power of sin also means we're required (key word) to live how Jesus demands we live! Again, it's not to "earn points" with God but to be a good witness for Him!

Anyway, Chapter 2 is about Paul stating that fact as well as proving who he is! Remember Paul wasn't one of the 12 so one reason for writing this letter was to prove that he was sent by Jesus, so Paul can be trusted when he claims salvation is strictly by faith in Jesus. In the early part of this chapter, Paul talks about the fact he traveled to Jerusalem 14 years after he first met a few of the "12". This time (14 years later) Paul brought with him a helper who was not Jewish by birth. The Jerusalem church (almost all of which were from Jewish backgrounds) didn't require Titus (the guy Paul brought) to be circumcised. It is a symbolic way people converted to Judaism. In the book of Acts, Paul had Timothy circumcised as they were witnessing to Jewish people. Some of them knew Timothy was half-Jewish, so to avoid that being an issue, Timothy agreed to that "minor surgery". The point is we often do things in order to be a good witness for Jesus, but these are not things we have to do to earn our salvation!

The bottom line of the first 10 verses of this chapter was that the Jewish Christians (head church) said they approved of what Paul taught and preached and were in agreement with him. Therefore, it wasn't necessary for non-Jewish Christians to well, "go under the knife" to be circumcised! I am sure that was a big relief to a lot of men. The only thing the head church asked of Paul was that he remembered the poor! Most likely what that meant was, Jewish-Christians in Israel were ex-communicated from Jewish society, so many Jewish Christians in Israel were poor because of that law there.

Then comes my favorite part of the chapter. Imagine a big party where one of the disciples was at that party! Everyone would want to meet them and here what they had to say! A long time ago when I was young, my mom's cousin (the Roman Catholic Archbishop for all of Croatia) came to my hometown of San Pedro, CA. That town has a large Catholic Croatian population. His coming was a big event with a lot of dinners in his honor. I thought of that as I pictured what a large crowd with a famous person as the guest of honor! Here in Galatians 2, Peter shows up for a big "shing ding" with the Antioch church (Paul's home church). When they ate, Peter separated himself from the non-Jewish Christians so he can eat what Jewish people ate! I can just imagine the gossip in the room! Paul told Peter's in effect, "Why are you separating yourself like this? Don't you know all of us are saved by faith alone, and separating yourself sends a horrible message to the crowds here?"

Bottom line Paul was successful in that "call out" despite the fact it was Peter himself. That incident is recorded throughout all history in the bible. Do I believe Peter is saved? Of course? Did he mess up a little here? Yes.

The point for you and me is having the boldness to say what is right! At the least be willing to stand up for what is the truth! Would we lose our salvation if we don't? Of course not. We, like Peter then, are just a bad witness for Jesus just at that moment. My hunch is Peter and Paul hugged after that and Paul stated what needed to be said! (By the way my mom's late cousin was very nice guy. I still recall how gracious he was meeting everyone at those functions. He died as a Roman Catholic cardinal!)

Paul finishes the chapter (as I love to state, there were no chapter breaks in the original text) by stating the basics again, that we are saved by faith alone! Ever stop to think why Satan work so hard on those who are believers? Remember his goal: To keep people away from Jesus or at the least make us a bad witness for Jesus. That's why demons work "within the church" falsely teaching the necessity of doing good works to be saved! Anyway, Paul makes the point he "died to the law" by living just for the sake of preaching and living out the Gospel message. In effect Paul ends the chapter by saying if we can be saved by keeping the law, then there's no purpose for Jesus to die for our sins in the first place!

That leads to the logical question, what about the law itself? What purpose does it serve if we can't be saved by keeping the law? That's the main topic of Chapter 3, that I'll get to in the next lesson! For all

of us regulars, what I hope we each get is a little boldness to stand for the truth and recognize moments when we start thinking God's proud of me for what I'm doing right now! It's faith alone!