
Confronting with the Gospel

Galatians 1:11-2:21

Introduction Do you believe people will distort history in order to achieve their own ends? Politicians are amazingly adept at this, either about their own records, or even more famously, about the records of their opponents. The upcoming presidential primaries and elections (Nov, 2008) promise to be full of amusing and awful distortions of fact and history for the sake of winning. While this is almost expected in politics, we are now finding that we cannot trust scientists or historians. The facts of research are often distorted to serve ones' theory.

Global warming is an interesting distortion aimed to serve an agenda. The alarm over the supposed increase in the average temperature of the earth has been exposed on many fronts as having an environmental and political agenda. The facts of science simply do not hold up. Creighton has written two, science-myth busting novels which he says are "fiction, except where they are true."

It is also fascinating to watch the history of the Muslim world being rewritten to tame down and tone down a violent and vicious religion. It has been a religious culture that has produced amazing mathematics and awful murders. But you would hardly know that from listening to the peaceful palaver passing for insightful analysis.

One of the challenges for leadership is learning to disagree with integrity. What I have often seen is a failure to accurately represent those who think differently. This is dishonest and disabling of real interaction toward resolution. Our political leadership needs to think about this. We need to think about this in areas where we have honest differences of opinion. For example, I believe the use of the debate technique of a straw man must be shunned by Christians. To intentionally misrepresent your opponent in order to cause him to defend what he does not actually believe is wrong.

So Paul is setting the record straight. He has been misrepresented and lied about. So here we are with real story of confronting with the gospel.

His Responsibility for the Gospel Message (1:11-24)

His Response to the Accusations (v.11-12)

Paul's assertions here are a response to an accusation made against him. The false teachers, the Judaizers, were saying that what Paul taught was man-made. It was not according to the traditional reading of the Old Testament. He had changed what the Bible taught in order to make it easier for Gentiles to be saved.

Paul responds that the gospel he preaches is not a human gospel. It is neither according to human standards nor according to human giving. What he teaches he has received by direct revelation from Christ.

It is not of man – not compiled by human authority, reasoning, logic (v.1, 11).

It is not from man – was communicated to Paul by Christ alone (v.1, 12).

His Reception of the Gospel

(v.13-17)

A pack of wolves are trailing along behind Paul. Everywhere he went and established a church with Gentile converts, membership and ministry, these wool suited hounds have come in behind to defame the minister and distort the message of the gospel. They have been emboldened by minor successes and are now seeking to win converts to their sect all through out Galatia. Apparently, they are attacking Paul by inventing stories and interpreting facts wrongly. They have accused him of secret trips, hidden agendas and private aspirations to covertly move the center of the church from Jerusalem to Antioch.

In order to counter the false claims and accusations made by his opponents, he sets the facts straight. At the center of this narrative of his conversion is the insistence that he received the gospel directly from Christ. Further, due to the simple facts of history, he could not possibly have received the gospel he preached from anyone at Jerusalem.

His testimony begins with his persecution of the church. He had obtained authority to find, prosecute and kill anyone who taught the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did so as a result of his growth and standing in Judaism and as a Jewish leader. Note what he is saying. His zeal for the rabbinical traditions, the Pharisees interpretation of the Old Testament, his passion for a legalistic, Mosaic righteousness motivated a hatred for the true gospel. He has effectively just indicted his opponents. He persecuted the church physically; they are persecuting the church doctrinally. They are doing so for the same reasons.

He relates how God, in sovereign grace and mercy, had chosen him, called him, saved him and sent him to preach. He, that former most righteous of Pharisees, was to now preach the gospel of salvation among the Gentiles. His conversion and assurance came through a disclosure of Christ in Him. He, by faith, had Christ disclosed to him

He does not then consult with anyone around him nor does he go up to Jerusalem to meet with the apostles there. Instead, he went alone into Arabia and returned to Damascus. Other texts tell us that during this period, he received by revelation the truths about Christ and the church that shaped his apostolic interpretation of the Old Testament that we read in the epistles.

So, he was terribly wicked as a righteous Jew. God had saved and sent him. What he preached was directly from God and authoritatively for the church.

His Relationship with the Jerusalem Church (1:18-2:10)

Now he begins to clarify his relationship with the Jerusalem church. This is extraordinary in that it gives the time between events that appear at first glance from the book of Acts to be close together. We are often in a hurry to move into leadership. Listen, Paul, sent to preach the gospel, waited for around 11 years until called to Antioch. That does not mean he was not ministering; but it is extraordinary patience in waiting for God's providence to move him from local into global ministry.

His Call on Peter (v.18-24)

Paul relates his visit to the church in Jerusalem three years after his conversion (v.18-19). He is deeply concerned that people understand that he has no personal animus against Peter. His defense of the gospel is not intended to be an attack on the church at Jerusalem nor on its leadership. He spent two weeks visiting with Peter. He does not remember seeing any of the other apostles except for James, the Lord's brother. This assertion must be contrary to what his opponents are saying. Look at this exclamation in verse 20, "I am not lying..." Others must have accused him of misrepresenting what he had done.

In spite of visiting with the apostles there, he still was largely unknown in the churches in Judea. They had heard of him, as you can well imagine. Yet they came to not only accept him but to glorify God because of him (v.22-24). Imagine if Osama Bin-Laden suddenly emerged and began meeting with trusted, prominent Reformed Christian leaders and professed Christ among them, asking to be baptized as a Christian. Such an announcement would be met with certain skepticism. But suppose he met with the Elders here and the Fellowship of Reformed Evangelicals and it was clear from his testimony that he was converted and following Christ. Then, there would be amazing joy and great glorifying of God.

His Concerns with the Leadership (2:1-3)

Fourteen years later, Paul goes up to Jerusalem accompanied by Barnabas and Titus. He is bringing a Jewish and a Gentile ministry partner. He went because God had told him directly to go. In a private meeting with the church's leadership, he laid out the gospel as he preached it (v.1-2).

Now, the question is: did Paul do this in order to have his teaching approved by the church at Jerusalem? I do not believe so. Paul goes up to Jerusalem to confront the leadership with the problems of legalism there. His concern is not to have them approve what he taught. He is confronting them about their own theological drift.

Where do I get this? The phrase, "To make sure that I was not running or had run, in vain," Paul uses this phrase here in Galatians (4:11) and in 1 Thessalonians (3:5) when he is concerned about other's failures. He sees himself as laboring in vain when people begin to stray in doctrine or in life. That he and the apostles were on the same page is evidenced by the fact that no one there compelled Titus, an uncircumcised Greek, to be circumcised (v.3). Now we have the first mention of the core issue. Having come to Christ for salvation, does a Christian return to Moses for transformation or sanctification⁴? We will be following the

issue through the book. But even at this point, it is evident that since we have been sanctified at our conversion, since we have been delivered from this present evil age, then we do not need and should not require the works of the Law. *Gentiles neither need to be circumcised nor to become Jews because of the Law in order to be saved or in order to grow in Christ.*

His Confrontation with the False Brothers (v.4-6)

However, sitting among the leadership of the church, were those of the Judaizers sect. These were false brothers, unbelieving men who were in the church and were slipped into the meeting in order to see what Paul was teaching and to oppose it. Their efforts were underhanded and sneaky. They did not act with integrity. They did not come with clear, reasoned honesty to wrestle with the issue at hand. Their tactics then were no different than what Paul faced at Galatia and what we face today. It is quite evident that even in many evangelical churches there are those who act as these did and teach what they taught.

But Paul is not finished. They were there to spy out the glorious freedom we have in the New Covenant and to bring professing Christians back into bondage or slavery under the Old Covenant. So Paul would not submit to them. They may have been influential and respected in the church, but Paul was not going to yield to them. The gospel granted grace to Jew and Gentile alike. He was not going to allow anyone to be brought back into the old realm again. They were not going to be allowed to add anything to the gospel he taught (v.4-5).

Notice how he characterizes them. They slip in to spy out. They enslave. They demanded submission from Paul. But Paul was fighting to maintain the integrity of the gospel. And he still is. He is certainly saying that these people have little changed. They are secretive and underhanded. They use influence and position to try to force others to yield to them (v.6). They are seeking to enslave people to the Old Covenant and Judaism. And he will not yield to them, not ever, not at all. Neither will we. We will hold fast to the gospel. We will preach and practice the saving grace of God which has delivered from our sins and this evil realm. We will see the Old Covenant fulfilled in Christ. We will live in the newness of the new. We will resist all attempts to take us back to Moses.

His Confirmation by the Apostolic Leadership (v. 7-10)

Finally, the false teachers and their error were exposed. Their phony attempts at unity which were actually dividing the church were over turned. The apostles affirmed the gospel that Paul had taught. This would be the watershed council. From here, no one may preach or practice a gospel contrary the whole of Paul's teaching. They saw the saving and enabling grace that God had given Paul and Barnabas and Titus. They partnered together with them in the gospel.

Evidently, the Judaizers were attempting to divide Paul and Peter. They were saying that they were teaching different gospels. This was not so. Peter had received a direct vision sending him to preach the gospel to a Gentile, Cornelius. Paul was the Apostle to the Gentiles. However, there was not and is not a difference in the gospel. There is no Petrine gospel and there is no Pauline gospel. There is no Jewish gospel and there is no Gentile gospel. There is simply the gospel. Now, God's grace primarily enabled Peter to take the gospel to the Jews.

Paul was primarily enabled to take the gospel to the Gentiles. But it was the same message through the same method. The difference was the primary ministry target. Peter would go to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles. And all would remember to preach the gospel to the poor, something already dear to Paul's heart.

So, the council concluded. There is only one gospel. It is for all people. It brings us into the freedom of grace and delivers us from the slavery to Law. This is what Paul taught. This is what the Bible records. This is what we believe and teach. Now, many labels down through history have been slapped on people who teach that we are neither justified nor sanctified (transformed) by the Law. What we teach is sometimes labeled Antinomianism. This charge is commonly lobbed at us from deep in the Reformed camp. I attended a conference in 1994 where one prominent pastor and theologian, expounding on the Sermon on the Mount, no less, said; "Moses bring us to Christ for salvation. Christ takes us to Moses for sanctification." This is heresy. This is exactly the error, if applied consistently in daily living, that the circumcision party in Jerusalem taught. We are of the grace group! We believe the gospel – we will live in the freedom of the New Covenant. We will live holy lives under grace.

His Rebuke of the Apostle Peter

(2:11-21)

But the story does not end there. One must not only argue for being justified by grace, but one must live out the gospel personally, practically and publicly. Sadly, Peter did not. Unhappily, Paul had to confront him and rebuke him.

Its Need because of Peter's Actions

(v.11-13)

It was a great scene at the church in Antioch. Hundreds had come to know the Lord, most of them Gentiles. Barnabas was helping to organize the church and had brought Paul in as to teach. The church was growing and flourishing. Peter came to visit the church. Though not recorded by Luke, Paul here narrates it for us. They gathered for the potluck dinner they called the agape feast where the Lord's Table was normally served. Peter joined right in, fellowshiping with all the believers. It was great to see the cross-cultural, cross-ethnic fellowship.

But then, at another service and dinner, other guests came to join. They were there having been sent by James. Peter suddenly had a problem. What if they reported back to James and somehow it got out that Peter was joining in with the Gentiles, violating the ceremonial food laws. The circumcision party in Jerusalem might find out and his ministry would suffer harm. He was very concerned.

So, he withdraws from the meal and the fellowship. Others leave to see what is going on. He explains his concerns. By the time it is over, the Jews from Jerusalem and the Jews in the church at Antioch have followed Peter's example and are on their way out. Paul watches as this unfolds and then, to his dismay, even Barnabas joins in the exodus. They are, by their actions, saying that the gospel does not truly unite them into one.

Paul steps out and in front of them all, confronts Peter. Ah, the power of a well crafted and convicting question! His question is locked and loaded. The first shot exposes Peter. He has been living as though he is a Gentile. In other words, Paul is not going to let him hide what he has been doing. He has been fellowshiping

with and eating with the Gentiles. He, a Jew, has been living like a Gentile. So, everyone now knows including the men from James.

The second shot destroys his opponent's position. How can Peter, James, the circumcision party – how can anyone force the Gentiles to live like Jews? Peter is acting out of fear, not conviction. He cannot claim conscience; he has already eaten with the Gentiles. He cannot claim conviction; he was a member of, a signatory to and in agreement with the council declaring the gospel for all. So, on what ground is he now going to stand?

What brought Paul up out of his seat to confront, this most outstanding of apostles? He saw that they were not walking in step with the truth of the gospel. The word perceive indicates an insightful and incisive finding. He recognized someone being out of step with what the gospel taught and implied. For Paul, the gospel shapes our right standing and our right conduct. He does not divide them. He can distinguish them. But what one claims in justification must impact ones conduct.

Its Nature Rooted in Christ's Work

(v.14-21)

Paul then goes on to expound the gospel for the sake of those who stood around and writes his argument down for the sake of all of us who read it. I believe that verses 14-21 are the summary of sermon Paul preached to those hypocritical Jews.

Justification - Their Standing in Salvation

(v.14-16)

Paul opens with a bit of sarcasm. He says, "We all know that you and I and the rest of the Jews standing around here are not sinners like the Gentiles. However, we are sinners none the less." No one can be justified by the works of the law. Period. No one ever was saved by the works of the Law. The works of the Law are by nature something we do, not something we receive or something imputed to us. Righteousness is not transmitted or imputed by law-keeping. We all are standing on the same ground. We are justified through faith.

Now, we have all believed in order to be justified by faith and not by works. Paul is showing that saving faith consciously rejects good works, even the works of the Law, as the grounds of justification. The constant question all men ask, "What must I do to be saved?" The clear, consistent and clarion response in the Scriptures is, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved." Believe is the response to the "do" question. You can only have a right standing before God by believing in Jesus Christ. Nothing you can do: no works of the law, no religious duty, deep religious feelings, expressions nor even mighty works of power can save you. Have you consciously turned away from works and turned to a Person, to the Lord Jesus. What are you trusting in: a decision? Baptism? The good you've done? No, believe in Christ. This is the call.

Three times Paul repeats that no one can be justified by the works of the Law. Now this cuts in several ways. It is not possible that law works can justify

because of the nature of those works. It is not possible to be justified by law because you cannot keep it – one simple violation condemns. It is not possible to be justified by law because it demands death. In a sense, Paul is leaning over into Peter's face and into ours say, do you get this?

Crucifixion - Their Supply for Transformation (v.17-21)

Justification and transformation are interwoven (v.17-18). Those who are justified by faith in Christ must not return to sin. If we abandon Jewish observances and law, is Christ then serving the cause of sin? If we revel and rejoice in our justification in such a way that we permit sin, have we then made Christ the servant of sin? May we live sinful lives since we have been justified? No certainly not! Must we have law in order to live holy lives? No. Certainly not! So, what is the gospel's provision for justification and transformation?

It is the cross. It is the sacrificial work of Christ in his death and resurrection. Here, it is focusing on the provision wrought by his crucifixion.

In a short pity statement, Paul says the following. God demanded death for violating His commands. In the law God made that clear. Under the sentence of the Law, Jesus died. When He died, He satisfied the demands of the Law. Therefore, through the Law, by faith in Christ, we have died to the Law. Now, don't think of death as a cessation, or an ending. Think of it as a separation from. The Law goes on, as we will find out. But through the crucifixion of Christ, I have been separated from the realm where the Law is in force (v.19). Furthermore, I have now been brought to life so that I might live in the realm where grace is in force. Separated from the Law by the death of Christ I am now alive to live for Him. The trajectory of transformation is not under law but towards Christ. This same argument is expanded and explained more fully in Romans 6-8.

Since we have died to the Law and are now alive in Christ, we must renounce law righteousness and live unto Christ (v.20). The life we now have in union with Christ is His own life imparted to us and residing in us through the Spirit. We have been united to Christ so that we are in Him and He in us (John 17:23). So, the life we now live in the flesh, this life we continue to live here and now, we live *by faith* in the One who loved us and gave Himself for us. *To go back to law is to not live by faith. It is to snub and shun the one who loves us. It is to deny the full effect of why He gave Himself for us.*

Verse 21 is the final charge against his opponents and answer to their error. As one has put it: [*New Bible Commentary*, D.A. Carson, Editor]

The apostle makes crystal-clear what has motivated him to speak so strongly. It is the value of the death of Christ, and therefore the principle of grace, that is at stake. If we live to God, it is only because we have been united with Christ crucified. He gave himself for us, and he makes possible the life of faith. If the Judaizers were right—if we could receive righteousness by observing the law—there would be no need for grace, and Christ's self-giving would have been a waste.⁵

The gospel in its truth is to be believed and lived.

Conclusion

It must be received from the Scriptures alone. There is no other source for the gospel. This book is truth. It does not matter what you think about it, what you feel about it. This is the truth. If you do not believe the gospel that the Holy Word of God teaches you will die in your sins forever separated from God in eternal judgment of hell. Will you not believe the gospel and bow to God today?

It must be lived in our lives. We must know and understand the gospel in such a way that it shapes everything. We must be discerning with it. We must guide and guard our relationships with it. We must fight sin with it. We must turn away from any teaching that grounds our righteousness in anything except the work of Christ.

Believe all that the gospel teaches. You have been crucified with Christ, yet you live. You have been cut away from the old and are now alive in the new. You do not live by law but by the grace of God. You live now by faith in Christ. You are responsible to work this out in every area of life.

Finally, be so committed to Christ and confident in the gospel that you will confront others with it. Know what is at stake. Hold the line. Glorify Christ.

Here is the gospel we have been taught, we have received and we hold fast to:

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father, to whom be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Notes

⁴ Some will notice that I am intentionally using the word transformation instead of sanctification. Sanctification is, with one or two exceptions, used almost exclusively of the once for all setting apart work at our conversion. The idea of transformation, growth and maturity is, in my view, often mislabeled, progressive sanctification. Confusing our once for all sanctification when we are cut off from the old we used to be and placed into the new we are becoming and transformation, the outworking of our salvation in practical holiness will make understanding Galatians much more difficult. The completed work of sanctification by the Spirit at our conversion *is* what circumcision pointed to and was the foreshadowing of. What circumcision indicated, sanctification has done. Thus, the call for returning to Moses, the need for Gentiles to become Jews by circumcision and to live by the Law all distorted the gospel which taught that Jesus gave Himself to deliver us from this present evil age.

⁵D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary : 21st Century Edition*, Rev. Ed. of: *The New Bible Commentary*. 3rd Ed. / Edited by D. Guthrie, J.A. Motyer. 1970., 4th ed. (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, Ill., USA: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), Ga 2:1.