

“The Gospel Accountability”

- Galatians 1:15 – 2:10 -

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Galatians 1: 15 – 2:10 *But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother’s womb and called me through His grace, 16 to reveal His Son in me, that I might preach Him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, 17 nor did I go up to Jerusalem to*

those who were apostles before me; but I went to Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. 18 Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. 19 But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother. 20 (Now concerning the things which I write to you, indeed, before God, I do not lie.) 21 Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia. 22 And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ. 23 But they were hearing only, “He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.” 24 And they glorified God in me. 1 Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. 2 And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain. 3 Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. 4 And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), 5 to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. 6 But from those who seemed to be something—whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man—for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me. 7 But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter 8 (for He who worked effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles), 9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. 10 They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.

1:15-17

When Paul was called by God, he clearly didn’t immediately go to get permission from what he perceived to be the earthly “powers that be.” He first took time to clarify his call and to hear from God. Not for a week or a month, but for *three years*. He took the time to allow God to “reveal His Son to him.”

Furthermore, Paul did not go out and get himself a seminary degree. I say that not to denigrate orthodox ministerial training, but we cannot disregard the objective, the priority, and the personal time set apart for God to be the teacher. It seemed that a lot of the major players in scripture had their “desert time.” Moses, John the Baptist, and even Jesus Himself spent time “out there.”

And be forewarned, it can take a long time, especially if your heart is hard. True ministry is not a *job*. It is a life calling... a lifetime mission. For Moses, it was **40 years** before he found his place. So don’t disregard or shun the quiet times. If you want to be greatly used by God, there will be a time of simple service, a time of growing and hearing from God. Trust me, there are no shortcuts. No ways around the desert. Seminary is no short cut.

Paul’s call came long before he realized it. It was clear that he had a lot of junk to go through. Call it “preparation.” Even the bad stuff we pass through can be turned into teaching moments, thus equipping us for



our service unto God. The reality is we would not be the people we are, nor would be as capable to engage the world according to our call, had we not gone through the muck and climbed out.

The obvious question here is, if Paul says he got all this directly from God, how do we really know that for sure? I mean a lot of people claim they are getting messages from God right? In the end, everyone has to be judged by their fruit. Certainly faith plays a significant part in all of this. There's no doubt about that. But believing something doesn't mean it's true, despite plenty of people who say otherwise.

The fact is, men have had 2,000 years to discredit Paul. It's not hard to prove a map is faulty when it doesn't lead to where it says it leads. But when thousands have followed that map and it comes out where it says it will, its authenticity is hard to argue against.

We have a problem with the fact that religious zealots, including Paul in his B.C. days, are so, well, *zealous*. We've met some of these folks. They are so convinced, so sold on their "rightness." They can be so very sincere, and yet, still so *very wrong*. In a world where people seem so indifferent and apathetic toward most everything, it's truly hard to disregard such commitment, however blind we see it as. That's the point then, isn't it? We can believe something so emphatically and be so absolutely wrong. Paul was previously the embodiment of that fact. And we can be too.

1:18-19

Paul was a rare individual whose expressed his zeal in more than just words. He was seemingly also quite willing to sacrifice. That may at this point in the story seem to be a non-issue, but in fact it has everything to do with the book of Galatians.

It really comes down to what each of us think that the gospel and grace really means. If grace is nothing more than a free ride, then Paul's sacrifices meant nothing—a pointless and useless exercise. But Paul was willing to sacrifice when he walked in orthodox Judaism...he put it all on the line for his faith. Then, when he found the true gospel, He was still willing to sacrifice even his very life, for the cause of Christ and Him crucified. He didn't attempt to receive Christ and then find go home and find the TV clicker. Therefore Paul's life stands directly in the way of a cheap grace and an esoteric gospel, one that fails to call upon each of us to respond with all we are and all we have.

We need to see today that after his three years of "desert training," Paul did not attempt to "go it alone." To attempt such would run contrary to the accountability and community that Christ Himself advocated. Paul, despite God's great grace, still had to *respond* to that grace and further, *act upon that grace*. His actions actually had to be correct actions, not just whatever came to mind and whatever he wanted to do. He never saw gospel as a free lunch. It was instead a key to the cell door of his life. One in which he had to actually take the key and act.

After his desert experience, Paul did he blow off his brothers and ignore those who had "blazed the trail" before him and had sacrificed for the kingdom so he might be in it. Paul was righteously humble and acknowledged their sacrifice before he arrived on the scene. He therefore journeyed to Jerusalem to check in with "the boys." Like ordination, Paul wasn't looking to them for a call to ministry; he already got that from God. He was however looking for brotherly confirmation and receptance to the ranks of ministry. In fact, it seems He was looking for the equivalent of what we deem as ordination. Not permission, not anointing, just unity of spirit and cause.

1:20

Now here we have Paul again saying, “Hey, I’m not lying. This stuff I’m telling you about Jesus is true.” But as we said before, lots of folks will tell you that, all the while lying through their teeth or zealously believing in an absolute lie.

Just take a moment and think about the gospel and the whole of the Bible and salvation. *What do we know about the human condition?* Well, we’re wicked, evil, and depraved, self-righteous to the core. There’s nothing naturally good in us. Would Christians make that reality up? Why? We hate that fact!

What about God himself? Well, there’s only one God, and He exists as three persons: Father, Son, and Spirit. Make it up? We still don’t even know what it means! *How about the fact that God at times speak through certain men whom God would choose for no apparent earthly reason or merit? How about the Doctrine of hell?* Who is going to make that up? *How about the fact that there is only one God and we must love Him and Him alone or otherwise we go to hell?* We’re wicked, evil, sinful, and separated from him while He’s holy, righteous, and good. Let’s face it...if Paul, *or we*, were going to make a religion, we wouldn’t invent this one.

1:21-24

So Paul moves out to engage the culture. There is so much more in these verses than we get on the surface. Can you imagine? How the rumors must have flown! *“Hey, I heard the other day that some guy is out in Syria and Cilicia, that is claiming to be Paul, ‘the butcher’ of Tarsus, and ...are you ready for this, he’s preaching the Christianity! Oh man, those guys up in Cilicia have been standing in the sun too long.”*

Maybe today it would go more like this. *“You know that one guy we used to party with? What’s his name? You know who I mean. He ended up in jail and on the news? Ya, ya, that’s the guy. Well, word has it that he got hooked up with those crazies over at the church by the park. You know the one. The one with the crazy preacher with the beard. Ya, and, are you ready for this? I guess he ‘found Jesus’ and now he’s doing his own preaching and doing that Jesus thing! Oh man! What a crazy church!”* That IS the gospel grace, gang! And “they glorify God because of us.”

2:1

Paul was traveling with Titus and Barnabus at this point, and it must have been a risky and a potentially reputation damaging act to have been friends with Paul at that time. We need to remember that we may today desire to know Paul personally and maybe even spend time with him, but he wasn’t always such a great guy.

Things haven’t changed in that area. Often, it can be socially expensive to befriend those whom the Lord has changed, especially when it is early in the game and that individual hasn’t had a lot of time to prove himself and show that he has been so transformed. Barnabus however seemed to be a guy that possessed a great discernment and ability to “size up a man.” And he must have been a man of fine Christ-like character because it was generally understood that he was a fairly wealthy “big-man-in-town,” yet he still hung around the “wrong” people as far as social circles went, including Paul and a Gentile named Titus!

With the mention herein of 14 years, we are again reminded that these events, while moving briskly in the biblical record, took place over a lengthy period of years. That is very important to note because we can easily and often feel that God has “put us on the shelf” or is failing hear us, or has no desire to use us despite our faithful response to him.

Ironically, even after 14 years of faithful ministry, Paul’s detractors are still after him. You would think that somewhere along the way they might recognize the fruit that was born from Paul’s work and life and would

therefore get off his case, but that was not the situation. It never is. A pastor I used to know would say that bitterness is like a twinkie...you can unwrap that thing after 20 years and it still as sweet...

2:2

Paul was forever unwilling to bend on the issue of the gospel truth. He was not going to check with 'the boys' as to what was fact when it came to Jesus, his crucifixion, resurrection, and manifest salvation. He was willing however, to submit himself and his ministry to scrutiny. He was willing to "come under the microscope" as to his life witness and ministry. In that, he had no fear. His heart was humble and he had nothing to hide. And moreover, he knew he could not "be all that he could be" if he went Rambo and flew solo.

This should be the policy of every believer. Certainly we answer to God first, no doubt and no debate. But a man who refuses to be accountable to other men is proud, stubborn, and hiding something.

James 3:17 "But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure. It is also peace loving, gentle at all times, and willing to yield to others. It is full of mercy and good deeds. It shows no partiality and is always sincere."

Proverbs 15:22 says there is "wisdom in a multitude of counselors." Therefore it has always been my policy, especially in difficult situations, to put all involved parties in a room and in prayer and honest discussion, the facts become evident. But there are plenty of folks who want nothing to do with such a practice, for they know that it is hard to hide the truth in such a venue, and hiding the truth, and operating in a lie is their mode of operation. They will verbally deny that, yet they will not sit down and discuss the facts as a group, nor will they place themselves humbly under the authority of other godly men. That's why people make a run for it instead of sitting down and discussing their issues. Paul's enemies 'lurked in the shadows.' They were unwilling to "come into the light" and talk as men of God are instructed in scripture to do.

Mt 5:23-24 "So if you are standing before the altar in the Temple, offering a sacrifice to God, and you suddenly remember that someone has something against you, leave your sacrifice there beside the altar. Go and be reconciled to that person. Then come and offer your sacrifice to God."

Mt 18:15-17 "If another believer sins against you, go privately and point out the fault. If the other person listens and confesses it, you have won that person back. But if you are unsuccessful, take one or two others with you and go back again, so that everything you say may be confirmed by two or three witnesses. If that person still refuses to listen, take your case to the church. If the church decides you are right, but the other person won't accept it, treat that person as a pagan or a corrupt tax collector."

2:3-5

Now we don't have too much info on this Titus, but he unwittingly played a real significant role in the development of the church. For he was the first real 'throw-down' on this journey of gospel and grace, because he was a redeemed believer and an uncircumcised Gentile too.

What was being pushed herein was simply legalism. Many of the religious 'powers that be' wanted Titus to be circumcised. Such was a religious 'hoop' that he was supposed to jump through in order to make him worthy somehow for redemption and service. But Titus wasn't going to have anything to do with that! And neither was Paul.

Indeed there is nothing that a gospel altering individual hates more than a person embracing their grace! It just drives them crazy. There are plenty of folks that are controlled by the human need to make people do what they want, to justify their actions and thus make them feel better about who they are and how they live.

Please note that those guys never quit going after Paul and those who harass us aren't likely too either. It only shows that men haven't changed in 2000 years! They just really need for you to be unhappy. So they'll lie, falsely accuse, call you names, and generally do anything they can to wipe that smile off your face.

Now Paul did what I was previously advocating, and that was to get everyone together in one room and lay it all out on the table. I don't think those causing the most trouble showed up at that meeting. They avoid those kind of gatherings because things don't go well for them in that kind of setting!

The boys that were at that meeting at first said, "ya...uh, no way." But Paul wasn't budging, and the others saw the truth in what was driving his stance. Paul was driven by the facts of the truth and his love for his flock. So for him, there was no other path. Such a defense however cannot be waged by just one man, by one pastor. The war must be fought by all those who stand in God's gospel and refuse to go back, and refuse to surrender their joy.

Paul was giving not even an inch to these 'spies.' And by the way, neither will we. We are here to glorify Jesus, promote the gospel, lead people to Christ, and disciple them for kingdom service. And we aren't going to stop, and we aren't going to bend. They will no doubt keep coming at us, but we will not cease.

2:6-10

Paul was ready to go up against anyone to defend the gospel, but ultimately such was unnecessary, because those in Jerusalem were a bunch of upright guys and they understood the facts. Paul didn't see religious 'kings and princes' up there in Jerusalem. They weren't flawless, and they weren't right by default. God wasn't impressed by their positions, any more than He's impressed with ours. He only cares what's in the heart of man. Paul just saw average guys that God had selected. Indeed they were being tested just the same as he was and everyone needed to man-up.

What they ultimately saw was the evidence of God's hand in Paul's ministry, and that was hard to argue against. It is an important aspect, for this is one of the ways we ascertain the real truth. We must step back and look, not merely at people's positions or titles or any of that earthly stuff. But look at the fruit coming forth from that individual and his actions. Is the gospel, *the simple and pure gospel*, being practiced and taught? Are people being disciplined? Is there love in that community? Is God working in their lives and in their midst? Because gang, you can say all you want, but that's the bottom line. Paul had the evidence and those in Jerusalem saw it.

What is the word for us in all of this?

Firstly, that those who would steal your freedom and joy in Christ are still out there. They want you to make judgments based on methods that are not scriptural and they seek to draw unto themselves disciples and followers, to satisfy their lust for power and personal satisfaction. Furthermore, we cannot be afraid of the accountability "light of day." Transparency is crucial to every ministry and to every true believer.

What God wants from us out of His gospel grace, is fellowship with those who support each other in ministry, those who have a proven track record of God's manifest and the truth of the gospel. He wants his greater church to be accountable **to** and accountable **for** each other.