

NOON BIBLE STUDY: GALATIANS 2

WHEN WE LEFT OFF IN GALATIANS 1 WE READ HOW PAUL WAS GIVING HIS "RESUME" OF SORTS TO VALIDATE HIS CLAIM THAT THE GOSPEL HE PREACHED TO THE GALATIANS WAS TRUTH FROM GOD - AND AS SUCH, ANYTHING OR ANYONE DIFFERING FROM THAT MESSAGE, WAS WRONG, AND TO BE "ACCURSED (1:8-9)." HE REMINDS THE GALATIANS THAT HE DIDN'T HEAR THE MESSAGE FROM CHRIST AND THEN GO AND CONSULT WITH OTHER LEADERS OR JOIN HIMSELF TO ALREADY ESTABLISHED TEACHERS OR PREACHERS - CHRIST SPOKE THE GOSPEL TO PAUL AND PAUL SPENT THE NEXT NUMBER OF YEARS DIGESTING AND EMBRACING THAT MESSAGE.

THIS DEFENSE FROM PAUL WAS ALSO DESIGNED TO BE A CHALLENGE TO ANYONE WHO MIGHT BE PREACHING A "DIFFERENT" GOSPEL. PAUL IS RHETORICALLY CHALLENGING HIS OPPONENTS WITH: "*HERE'S HOW I LEARNED THE GOSPEL, HOW ABOUT YOU?*"

GALATIANS 2:1-10 - PAUL MEETS WITH APOSTLES

AFTER 14 YEARS PAUL GOES BACK TO JERUSALEM AND BRINGS BARNABAS AND TITUS. PAUL HAD LARGELY AVOIDED JERUSALEM AND ONLY BRIEFLY MET WITH DISCIPLES AND APOSTLES FROM THERE UP TO THIS POINT.

HERE'S A REFRESHER OF WHO BARNABAS WAS. FLASHBACK TO THE FIRST FEW YEARS OF THE CHURCH IN ACTS:

ACTS 4:33-37 - AND WITH GREAT POWER THE APOSTLES WERE GIVING TESTIMONY TO THE RESURRECTION OF THE LORD JESUS, AND ABUNDANT GRACE WAS UPON THEM ALL. 34 FOR THERE WAS NOT A NEEDY PERSON AMONG THEM, FOR ALL WHO WERE OWNERS OF LAND OR HOUSES WOULD SELL THEM AND BRING THE PROCEEDS OF THE SALES 35 AND LAY THEM AT THE APOSTLES' FEET, AND THEY WOULD BE DISTRIBUTED TO EACH AS ANY HAD NEED. 36 NOW JOSEPH, A LEVITE OF CYPRIAN BIRTH, WHO WAS ALSO CALLED BARNABAS BY THE APOSTLES (WHICH TRANSLATED MEANS SON OF ENCOURAGEMENT), 37 AND WHO OWNED A TRACT OF LAND, SOLD IT AND BROUGHT THE MONEY AND LAID IT AT THE APOSTLES' FEET.

BARNABAS WAS A LEVITE, WHICH MEANT HE AND HIS FAMILY WOULD HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THE RELIGIOUS SERVICES AT THE TEMPLE IN JERUSALEM. HE WAS (FORMERLY) A DEVOTED MAN TO THE MOSAIC/JEWISH LAW. HE IS NOW PAUL'S FELLOW LABORER, BRINGING THE GOSPEL TO THE GENTILES AND ARGUING AGAINST GENTILE CHRISTIANS' NEED TO KEEP THE JEWISH LAW.

TITUS ON THE OTHER HAND WAS A GENTILE WITH GREEK HERITAGE (OPAH!). HE COMES FROM AN ENTIRELY DIFFERENT BACKGROUND AS BARNABAS (AND PAUL) AND YET IS THEIR FELLOW WORKER IN THE GOSPEL. TITUS WOULD BE A SIGNIFICANT FIGURE IN THE CORINTHIAN CHURCHES, SERVING AS A GO BETWEEN BETWEEN PAUL AND THE CORINTHIANS. PAUL WILL ALSO WRITE A LETTER TO TITUS WHICH WILL BE INCLUDED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

SO THIS IS PAUL'S TRAVELING CREW: HIMSELF A FORMER PHARISEE SPREADING THE GOSPEL OF JESUS THE MESSIAH WITH A JEWISH LEVITE AND A GENTILE GREEK.

WHEN PAUL ARRIVES IN JERUSALEM, HE FIRST MEETS WITH LEADERS OF THE CHURCH TO MAKE SURE THAT THE MESSAGE HE WAS PREACHING WAS IN AGREEMENT WITH THE MESSAGE THEY WERE PREACHING. HE DID THIS IN PRIVATE SO AS TO NOT CAUSE CONTROVERSY AND OUT OF HUMILITY TO THE FACT THAT IN SOME SENSE UP UNTIL THIS POINT HE HAD BEEN INDEPENDENT OF THE CENTRALIZED CHURCH (LOOSELY SPEAKING) (2:2).

WHEN HE MEETS WITH THE CHURCH LEADERS (WHO HE WILL EVENTUALLY CITE AS JESUS' BROTHER JAMES, PETER (AKA CEPHAS) & JOHN), THEY REJOICE THAT GOD HAD BEEN AT WORK IN AND THROUGH PAUL'S MINISTRY TO THE GENTILES. IT SEEMED THAT SOME OF THE APOSTLES WERE COMMISSIONED TO PREACH TO THE JEWS (PETER) WHILE PAUL AND HIS COMPANIONS WERE SERVING THE GENTILES (V. 7).

HOWEVER, WHILE IN JERUSALEM THEY ENCOUNTER WHAT PAUL CALLS "FALSE BRETHREN" (V. 4) WHO WERE "SECRETLY BROUGHT IN", AND "SNEAKED IN" TO "SPY"! THESE PEOPLE ARE LIKELY SIMILAR TO THE OPPOSITION THAT PAUL HAD ALREADY BEEN FACING THROUGHOUT THE JOURNEY. BUT BECAUSE OF THE GREAT WELCOME THAT THE APOSTLES GAVE TO PAUL AND THE ENCOURAGEMENT THAT THEY ALL HAD IN THE FACT THAT GOD WAS WORKING, THE OPPOSITION DID NOT DETER THE CHURCH AND HER UNITY.

BEFORE WE MOVE ON, IT'S INTERESTING TO OBSERVE HOW PAUL SPEAKS OF THESE LEADING FIGURES IN THE CHURCH. HE HONORS THEM BUT ISN'T IN AWE OF THEM. HE OBSERVES WHO APPEARS TO BE THE LEADERS (JAMES, PETER & JOHN WHO HAD A REPUTATION OF BEING "PILLARS", V. 9) AND IS GRATEFUL FOR THEIR PARTNERSHIP YET DOESN'T APPEAR TO BE STAR STRUCK.

V. 6 - "THOSE WHO WERE IN HIGH REPUTATION (WHAT THEY WERE MAKES NO DIFFERENCE TO ME; GOD SHOWS NO PARTIALITY.)"

HE'S EAGER TO WORK TOGETHER FOR THE PURPOSES OF THE GOSPEL AND CARING FOR THOSE IN THE CHURCH IN NEED. HE KNOWS THAT AT THE END OF THE DAY EVEN JAMES, PETER (CEPHAS) & JOHN ARE JUST MEN. IN FACT, HE'S GOING TO EXPERIENCE THIS FIRST HAND.

GALATIANS 2:11-14 - HYPOCRISY CONFRONTED

WHILE PAUL WASN'T STAR STRUCK BY THE LEADERS OF THE JERUSALEM CHURCH, THAT WASN'T THE CASE ABOUT EVERYONE. PAUL RETELLS TO THE ENTIRE GALATIAN AUDIENCE ABOUT A TIME WHEN MEN SENT FROM JAMES ARRIVE IN ANTIOCH. APPARENTLY WHEN THESE JEWISH BELIEVERS ARRIVED, SOME OF PAUL'S ASSOCIATES (INCLUDING EVEN BARNABAS!) STARTED ISOLATING THEMSELVES AMONGST DISCIPLES OF JEWISH BACKGROUND.

THEY WANTED TO BE LIKED BY THESE MEN AND RATHER THAN INTEGRATING THEM INTO THEIR DIVERSE AND UNITED COMMUNITY OF JEW & GENTILE, THEY RESORTED TO OLD PRACTICES OF KEEPING THE TWO GROUPS SEPARATE.

PART OF THE CONFRONTATION THAT PAUL DESCRIBES IS THAT HE PUBLICLY CALLED OUT PETER WHO WAS JOINING THEM IN THIS BEHAVIOR. PAUL SAW A CHANGE IN PETER ONCE THESE JEWISH MEN ARRIVED. PETER BEGAN TO "WITHDRAW" AND "HOLD HIMSELF ALOOF" (V. 12) OUT OF FEAR OF WHAT THESE OTHER MEN THOUGHT.

PAUL DID NOT SIMPLY ADDRESS THIS BASED ON PERSONAL OFFENSE OR IRRITATION BUT BASED ON THE GOSPEL ITSELF. THE GOSPEL ANNOUNCES THAT WE ARE SAVED AND FREED BY HAVING FAITH IN WHAT CHRIST HAS DONE - THE KEEPING OF THE LAW IS NOT REQUIRED TO MAKE ONE RIGHT WITH GOD. THE GENTILES WERE HEARING AND EXPERIENCING THIS - BUT THEN WERE CONFUSED BY PETER AND OTHERS RETURNING TO THE PRACTICES OF THE LAW (SPECIFICALLY REGARDING EATING).

PAUL ASKS - *WHICH IS IT GOING TO BE?!* THE STANDARD OF GOD MUST APPLY TO ALL THOSE WHO HAVE TURNED TO CHRIST. WE EITHER KEEP THE LAW OR NOT. PETER HAD ALREADY AGREED THAT THE KEEPING OF THE LAW WAS NOT NEEDED, YET LET HIS CONCERN FOR WHAT OTHERS THOUGHT SHAPE HIS BEHAVIOR.

AS A RESULT, HE WAS SEPARATING HIMSELF FROM THE VERY FAMILY THAT GOD HAD JUST CALLED HIM TO LOVE AND SERVE.

IT DOESN'T SEEM LIKE PETER WITHDREW BECAUSE HE WAS CONVINCED BIBLICALLY THAT HE SHOULDN'T EAT WITH GENTILES ANYMORE. NO, IT WAS HIS "FEAR" OF THE OPINION AND CRITICISM OF THESE OTHER MEN. PETER MADE BEHAVIORAL DECISIONS BECAUSE OF EMOTIONAL PRESSURE. HE MADE CHOICES IN HIS OWN LIFE BECAUSE OF WHAT OTHER PEOPLE *MIGHT* THINK ABOUT HIM.

AND AS A RESULT OF THIS POOR DECISION MAKING HE ENDS UP BEING HYPOCRITICAL AND SEPARATING HIMSELF FROM HIS SPIRITUAL FAMILY AND GOD'S WILL. WE WOULD DO WELL TO CONSIDER HOW WE SLOWLY COMPROMISE WHAT WE BELIEVE OR HOW WE BEHAVE BECAUSE OF ~~FEAR~~ AND THE OPINION OF OTHERS.

PROVERBS 29:25 - THE FEAR OF MAN BRINGS A SNARE, BUT HE WHO TRUSTS IN THE LORD WILL BE EXALTED.

PROVERBS 29:25 (NLT) - FEARING PEOPLE IS A DANGEROUS TRAP, BUT TRUSTING THE LORD MEANS SAFETY.

GALATIANS 2:15-21 - THE REST OF PAUL'S APPEAL TO PETER (AND TO US)

PAUL APPEALS TO PETER THAT EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE BOTH JEWISH (AND THAT WAS A GOOD THING IN MANY WAYS), WHAT MAKES THEM RIGHT WITH GOD HAS LITTLE TO DO WITH THEIR JEWISH-NESS. PAUL WARNS THAT IF HE, OR PETER RETURN TO THE LAW, THEY ARE IN DANGER OF NULLIFYING THE WORK THAT CHRIST DID TO RECONCILE THEM WITH GOD. FOR IF THEY START TO GAIN FAVOR FROM GOD BY KEEPING THE LAW (EVEN IF JUST TO IMPRESS OTHERS), THEY ARE IMPLYING THAT WHAT JESUS DID ON THE CROSS WAS NOT ENOUGH!

GALATIANS 2:21 (NLT) - I DO NOT TREAT THE GRACE OF GOD AS MEANINGLESS. FOR IF KEEPING THE LAW COULD MAKE US RIGHT WITH GOD, THEN THERE WAS NO NEED FOR CHRIST TO DIE.

PAUL DECLARES THAT HE HAS BEEN "CRUCIFIED WITH CHRIST" AND NOW THAT OLD PERSON, THAT OLD WAY OF LIVING IS DEAD. AND AS CHRIST HAS RISEN TO NEW LIFE, SO NOW PAUL AND ALL THOSE WHO BELONG TO JESUS CHRIST LIVE A NEW LIFE - A LIFE THAT IS LIVED BY FAITH.

HE'S SPEAKING TO PETER, BUT HE'S SPEAKING TO THE GALATIANS THROUGH THE SITUATION WITH PETER. REMEMBER, THE CHALLENGE THE GALATIANS HAVE GOTTEN INTO IS THAT THEY ARE RETURNING TO THE LAW AND THINKING THAT THEIR OBEDIENCE TO IT IS WHAT GOD WANTS. THEY HAVE BEEN DUPED BY "SOME WHO ARE DISTURBING (THEM) AND WANT TO DISTORT THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST (1:7)."

AND SO WHY DOES PAUL SHARE THIS PRIVATE ENCOUNTER WITH THE GREAT APOSTLE PETER? BECAUSE IF ~~HE'S~~ SUSCEPTIBLE TO TURNING BACK TO THE OLD WAY OF LIVING, THEN THESE COMMON FOLK IN GALATIA CERTAINLY ARE TOO. IRONICALLY IN THIS LETTER SO FAR, PAUL DOESN'T TAKE A LOT OF STOCK IN OTHER PEOPLE OR THE "BIG NAMES" OF THE CHURCH BUT THEN USES ONE OF THE BIGGEST NAMES OF THE CHURCH TO WARN THEM ABOUT WHAT COULD HAPPEN TO THEM.

AND THAT'S WHERE PAUL WILL LEAVE HIS BIO-STORY AND TIMELINE FOR NOW BECAUSE HE HAS ESTABLISHED HIMSELF AT THIS POINT AS A CREDIBLE WITNESS TO THE TRUTH AND BOLSTERS HIS CRED BY TALKING ABOUT ALL HE HAS DONE TO ENSURE THAT HE IS ON THE RIGHT PAGE WITH GOD FIRST, AND WITH THE OTHER CHURCH LEADERS WHO MIGHT HAVE SOME WEIGHT AND NAME RECOGNITION TO THE GALATIAN CHRISTIANS. HE EVEN LETS THEM IN ON A PERSONAL AND TENSE MOMENT BETWEEN TWO OF JESUS' APOSTLES TO ILLUSTRATE THAT THE SIMPLICITY OF THE GOSPEL IS AT STAKE IN THIS MOMENT. AS WE TURN TOWARDS CHAPTER 3, PAUL IS GOING TO LAY THE HAMMER DOWN ON HIS CASE BY ASKING SOME TOUGH AND POINTED QUESTIONS AND CITING SOME WELL-KNOWN BIBLICAL PASSAGES TO BOLSTER HIS WORD. BUT WE'LL PAUSE HERE FOR NOW.

A FEW POINTS OF REFLECTION FROM THIS CHAPTER. AS WE DISCUSSED EARLIER, WE SHOULD WALK AWAY WITH SOME THINGS TO PONDER ABOUT OUR FEAR OF WHAT OTHER PEOPLE THINK AND HOW THAT MIGHT BE INFLUENCING OUR DECISIONS MORE THAN GOD'S WORD DOES. WE WANT TO ADMIT WHERE THAT MIGHT HAPPENING AND ADDRESS THAT WITH OUR FATHER IN HEAVEN. JESUS POINTEDLY REMINDS US:

"DEAR FRIENDS, DON'T BE AFRAID OF THOSE WHO WANT TO KILL YOUR BODY; THEY CANNOT DO ANY MORE TO YOU AFTER THAT. 5 BUT I'LL TELL YOU WHOM TO FEAR. FEAR GOD, WHO HAS THE POWER TO KILL YOU AND THEN THROW YOU INTO HELL. YES, HE'S THE ONE TO FEAR. 6 "WHAT IS THE PRICE OF FIVE SPARROWS-- TWO COPPER COINS? YET GOD DOES NOT FORGET A SINGLE ONE OF THEM. 7 AND THE VERY HAIRS ON YOUR HEAD ARE ALL NUMBERED. SO DON'T BE AFRAID; YOU ARE MORE VALUABLE TO GOD THAN A WHOLE FLOCK OF SPARROWS. (LUKE 12:4-7, NLT)

THERE IS A DISTINCTION BETWEEN CARING FOR OTHERS AND CARING WHAT OTHERS THINK. THIS DOESN'T MEAN WE BECOME RECKLESS AND OFFENSIVE BECAUSE "WHO CARES", BUT IT DOES MEAN WE DO WHAT WE DO FOR GOD AND NOT FOR PEOPLE, EVEN THOSE WHO WE RESPECT AND LOVE.

SECONDLY, WE ARE REMINDED THAT IT'S ONLY FAITH IN CHRIST THAT SAVES. I WOULD IMAGINE MOST OF US AREN'T STRUGGLING WITH WHETHER OR NOT WE SHOULD KEEP THE LAW OF MOSES. I THINK MOST OF US REJOICE IN THE FACT THAT WE COME TO CHRIST "JUST AS WE ARE". (AND BESIDES, MOST OF US READING THIS ARE GENTILES SO WE NEVER LIVED IN A WORLD THAT INCLUDED THE MOSAIC LAW AS A WAY TO HONOR AND WORSHIP GOD).

AND SO WHILE KEEPING KOSHER AND MAKING SACRIFICES MIGHT NOT BE A TEMPTATION FOR US, WE TOO SHOULD BE ON GUARD AGAINST ANYTHING THAT WE MIGHT BE DOING TO GAIN GOD'S APPROVAL. CHURCH SERVICE, GIVING MONEY, READING THE BIBLE, POSTING BIBLE VERSES OR OTHER QUOTES ON SOCIAL MEDIA, VOLUNTEERING, ATTENDING CHURCH SERVICES OR HOME FELLOWSHIPS, GETTING RID OF SECULAR MUSIC OR ENTERTAINMENT, HONORING OUR PASTORS AND LEADERS, VISITING THE SICK, GIVING TO THE POOR, DOING EVANGELISM OR MISSIONARY WORK - ALL GOOD AND GREAT THINGS - NONE OF WHICH SAVE US OR KEEP US FORGIVEN. THOSE THINGS CAN BE (AND LIKELY OUGHT TO BE) FROM THE OVERFLOW OF OUR LOVE FOR GOD AND ALSO SPIRITUAL PRACTICES WHICH HELP US STAY CONNECTED TO GOD AND WALKING BY THE SPIRIT. BUT THEY DO NOT SAVE US.

THE WORK OF JESUS CHRIST PLUS *NOTHING* EQUALS **EVERYTHING**.

WE NOW LIVE FOR HIM AND BY HIS POWER AND GUIDED BY HIS WORDS AND EXAMPLE BECAUSE HE IS A GOOD SAVIOR WHO HAS PURCHASED US FOR GOD, AND WHO WORTHY OF OUR DEVOTION.