

Chapter 2

1. Then fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with *me* also.

We are now provided with another window into the time-line of Paul's life – he returned to Jerusalem fourteen years after he had been escorted out by the Apostles. Acts 14 states that as the first evangelistic tour by Paul came to an end, he and Barnabas "... sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles. And there they abode long time with the disciples" (Acts 14:26-28). This *fourteen years* provides a time frame for the *long time* of Acts 14. What follows in the book of Acts outlines the reason for Paul and Barnabas making the journey to Jerusalem.

And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, *and said*, Except ye be circumcised after the manner [according to the custom] of Moses, ye cannot be saved. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension [strife] and disputation [mutual questioning] with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice [the region of Phoenicia¹] and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles: and they caused great joy unto all the brethren (Acts 15:1-3).²

Once again, we have the matter of some *dissension* spoken of very matter-of-factly in this epistle. Yes, Paul went up to Jerusalem again, but the reason for the journey was to meet with the leaders of the assembly there to sort out with them the Message that God had given him for all men, including the Gentiles. Acts tells us that he went up with Barnabas and *certain other* with them; we find out in our passage that one of those was Titus.

What Paul is doing is beginning to build his case to the Galatians that the elders and leaders of the assembly in Jerusalem did not dissuade him from the Message that he brought to the Gentiles, and part of that case is to specifically identify Titus as being with them during this time.

2. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

¹ Friberg Lexicon.

² Strong's Online.

The first phrase, *I went up by revelation*, is somewhat difficult to understand. The word *revelation* means “disclosure”³ or “an uncovering or revealing.”⁴ What this indicates is that Paul went to Jerusalem having been given insight by God specifically for dealing with this matter with the Jerusalem brethren. Acts 15:1-2 clarifies for us that the necessity of the Jewish rite of circumcision for the Christian (as held by some in Jerusalem) led to a major disagreement between those of Jerusalem and Paul and Barnabas, who had seen the work of God (without circumcision) among the Gentiles throughout the region of Galatia and elsewhere. It is evident that this delegation, which went from Antioch to Jerusalem, was charged with the task of resolving this matter. The assembly in Antioch selected the delegates to take their case to the Apostles in Jerusalem, but it was really Paul and the Message of truth that God had given him that were at the center of this dispute. This tells us that God prepared Paul for the task that was ahead: the Message, which God had given to him, was being called into question and he went to Jerusalem with the assurance that God was going to enable him for this undertaking.

In Acts 15 we read: “And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command *them* to keep the Law of Moses. And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter” (Acts 15:4-6). The *believers* with a Pharisaical background (not unlike Paul) would not let go of their Judaism (unlike Paul); they wanted the Law of Moses to remain in place – it was what defined them as Jews. What is interesting to consider is that the position of these *believers* was never evident until Paul and company arrived and began to rehearse what God was doing among the Gentiles; it was as Paul began to relate what God had been doing among the Gentiles that some of the brethren voiced their demand that the Law of Moses must be imposed upon these new Gentile believers. What this also tells us is that the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem were, for the most part, still adhering to the Mosaic Law and continuing their Jewish traditions. It caused the Apostles and elders, the leaders of the assembly in Jerusalem, to put their heads together to try to determine what to do with these conflicting opinions – further evidence that they had never considered this matter until now. During their huddle Peter rehearsed how the Lord had dealt with him regarding Cornelius and that there was no differentiation between Jew and Gentile before God (Acts 15:7-11). With this the bickering stopped, and Paul and Barnabas could proceed to relate all the signs and wonders that God had done through them among the Gentiles. The Christians from Antioch presented what God had done; they provided the assembly in Jerusalem with an account of all that had taken place (Acts 15:12), but what we find in our



³ Strong's Dictionary.

⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

passage is that the Message that Paul was bringing to the Gentiles (the real essence of the “problem”) was presented only to the leadership for evaluation. The events of God’s working among the Gentiles were given to all, but the ultimate source of the contention was dealt with *privately* among “them which were of reputation” – those who were recognized as the leadership of the assembly in Jerusalem. Paul, in setting the stage for dealing with the error that was taking over the Galatian believers, states very specifically that he laid out before the Jerusalem leadership “**that Gospel**” that he was proclaiming to the Gentiles. Paul set forth before these men, the full Gospel message that he was preaching – something that he had not been permitted to do when he went up to Jerusalem the first time (Galatians 1:18-19).

We see in our passage that the defense of the Message that God had committed to Paul was made to those of *reputation*. As the delegation from Antioch went to Jerusalem, along the way they openly *declared* what God had done among the Gentiles and “caused great joy unto all the brethren” (Acts 15:3). Their *declaring* was more than just a quick word; it means “to narrate in full.”⁵ As they passed through the regions of Phoenicia and Samaria (both were along their route from Antioch to Jerusalem) they took the time to fully rehearse, to the brethren in these areas, the salvation of the Gentiles and the works that God had done among them. This news of God’s grace at work was met with joy. Yet when they arrived in Jerusalem, they laid out the Message of God’s redemption for all men only before those of *reputation*; these would be the Apostles and elders as noted in Acts 15:4. *Reputation* is from a Greek word that means “to think,” and by implication “to seem.”⁶ Someone’s reputation is what is generally accepted about him but it does not mean that it is either true or false. In this case, it would refer to those who were held in high regard among the brethren in Jerusalem – those who were Apostles and elders.

Out of this private rehearsal of the Message that Paul had been given **by God** (we’ve seen that emphasized in Galatians 1:12), we see James taking the leading role in resolving this dispute (Acts 15:13-21). What is very interesting at this point, is to notice how James approaches this difficulty. When the disruption first arose among all of those who had come to hear from Paul and Barnabas, Peter, after some private discussion with the other Apostles and elders, reminded everyone of what God had shown him through his experience with Cornelius (Acts 15:6-11). As James begins, he says: “Simeon [Simon Peter] hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name” (Acts 15:14). James took what Peter had rehearsed, and broadened his experience with Cornelius to remind them that God came to Abraham, a Gentile, and for his obedience He promised that he would become a “great nation” and that through him everyone would be blessed (Genesis 12:2-3). With the passage of time, the Jews’ focus had become exclusive and arrogant; they had forgotten that God had come to their father, Abraham, when he was a pagan, and that it was through his faith in God that he was considered to be righteous. Is it any wonder that God, all through the Mosaic Law, made provision for the *stranger* who dwelt among them (Exodus 12:49; Numbers 9:14)? God’s call to mankind has always been universal, but the Jews, through their pride in being of the seed of Abraham and the contempt for the heathen that they had learned through their years of captivity, had neglected God’s Word to them and harbored great disdain for anyone outside of their race. James reminds them that the prophets spoke of the peoples of the world desiring the Lord. First he quotes from Amos (Acts 15:16): “In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will

⁵ Strong’s Online.

⁶ Strong’s Dictionary.

raise up his ruins, and I will build [or rebuild] it as in the days of old” (Amos 9:11),⁷ and then the words of Zechariah (Acts 15:17): “Yea, many people and strong nations [a reference to non-Jewish peoples (Gentiles)] shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem ...” (Zechariah 8:22). There are numerous passages in the OT Scriptures that speak of God’s call to all of mankind; very specifically, when Abraham was called it was with the conditional promise that “in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed” (Genesis 12:3). The Message that Paul declared to these men was not new, but it had been much neglected among the Jewish people.

God’s promise to Abraham was that all the peoples of the earth would be the beneficiaries of what He was about to begin with him (Genesis 12:3; 22:18). This promise was repeated to Isaac: “And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed ...” (Genesis 26:4). The Psalmist understood the universal call of God: “God be merciful unto us, and bless us; *and* cause his face to shine upon us; That thy way may be known upon earth, thy saving health [salvation] among all nations” (Psalm 67:1-2).⁸ “And it shall come to pass in the last days, *that* the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Isaiah 2:2-3; Micah 4:1-2). “I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to *them which were* not my people, Thou *art* my people; and they shall say, *Thou art* my God” (Hosea 2:23). These are just a sampling of the many passages that show the grace and mercy that God always had toward those whom the Jews despised, yet, despite the scribes and Pharisees being sticklers in keeping their rules and regulations, they failed to read the Word of God with understanding – they, like many theologians today, read the Scriptures in the light of their own doctrines. The Jewish Christians brought this baggage with them into their new faith, and, as we have seen, they had great difficulty letting it go.

How easily we condemn the scribes and Pharisees, yet what seems all too common today is that our theologies determine how we interpret God’s Word and what we do. I will never forget the shock and disappointment that I felt when I read from an elderly “Fundamental Baptist” pastor: “I am a Baptist by conviction.”⁹ Rather than searching the Scriptures to determine whether a position different from the Baptist tradition is more Biblically accurate, he simply staked his spiritual security and welfare on his Baptist theology. What a copout! If we are not prepared to take our favorite or traditionally accepted theologies to the Scriptures and weigh them carefully against the standard of God’s Word, then we are not worthy to teach others. As a matter of fact, the training that such men receive is neither Biblical nor sound; they have never been taught to study the Word of God, only to defend their particular, polished theology.

With this reminder of the work of God among their own people, James brought the discussion to a conclusion that they all seemed to find acceptable. We’ve already looked at the list of requirements that they enumerated, and noted that this is the last time that we ever hear anything of this list. Although the matter was officially settled in principle, as we can see from this epistle to the Galatians, it had not been settled in every area or within every individual. The very same

⁷ Strong’s Online.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ From personal correspondence with an elderly Baptist minister; June 12, 2008.

issue had reared its head again; there were still some “Jewish Christians” who thought that it was necessary for the Gentiles to keep some of the Jewish traditions in order to be truly saved.

In our passage, Paul clarifies why he met privately with the Apostles and elders to discuss the Gospel that he was proclaiming to the Gentiles: “lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.” The Greek word for *vain* speaks metaphorically “of one who boasts of his faith as a transcendent possession, yet is without the fruits of faith”¹⁰ – in other words, someone whose faith is no deeper than their words. There is humility in Paul’s approach to the brethren in Jerusalem; he did not go in with a heavy hand and chastise them for their inability to accept the task that the Lord had given him or the Message that the Lord had revealed to him. Paul came to them confident in what the Lord had given him, but not arrogant toward those whom some might have considered to be stuck in the rut of Judaism. This is a fine line that modern Evangelicals fail to navigate; in their well-documented and finely crafted theologies, they take great pride, and, in arrogance, they condemn those who do not agree with them. I have seen this to be particularly prevalent among the leaders of the independent Baptist churches where they enjoy overt control, and maintain that control through spiritual intimidation and intolerance of anything that is contrary to their understanding. However, not unlike the Pharisees of Jesus’ day, they fail to evaluate their doctrines against the whole of Scripture, but rather interpret the whole of Scripture in the light of their theologies. Paul’s instruction to Timothy fleshes out the approach that he took with the leaders in Jerusalem; it is so appropriate for our time (yet so often ignored): “And the servant [*doulos*; slave] of the Lord must not strive [be disputing]; but be gentle [kind] unto all *men*, apt [able] to teach, patient [in trials], In meekness [humility] instructing those that oppose themselves [who stand in opposition]; if God peradventure [perhaps] will [may; *give* is in the subjunctive mood – those opposing face a choice] give them repentance to the acknowledging [the full knowledge] of the truth; And *that* they may recover themselves [come to their senses (subjunctive mood)] out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).¹¹ That does not sound remotely like defending a theology or a personal opinion, but carefully presenting the Word of God, which is “sharper than any twoedged sword ... a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12), so that it may be used by God to confront the wayward with His truth.

3. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised:

Paul moves on to cite an example that speaks against adding circumcision or any of the other traditions of Judaism to faith in Christ, and thereby destroying the true Gospel. We’ve already noted that when he went up to Jerusalem as part of the delegation to sort out this knotty problem, Titus was part of that group. Having just stated that he made his case before the leaders of the Jerusalem assembly, Paul draws a significant contrast as he begins here: *but* – here is something that stands in contradiction to what has come before. *Neither* is the Greek word *oude* (*oo-deh*), which can also be translated as *not even*.¹² The thrust here is that *not even Titus* (who was with Paul at Jerusalem and a Greek) *was compelled to be circumcised*. What Paul is seeking to drive home to the Galatians is that if this was such a defensible issue, then the leaders in Jerusalem had

¹⁰ Strong’s Online.

¹¹ Friberg Lexicon.

¹² Strong’s Online.

an opportunity to make their point by insisting that Titus be circumcised after the custom of the Jews, but they didn't. Clearly, there were those among the believers in Jerusalem who tried to enforce such (Acts 15:5), but Jerusalem leadership was coming to realize that God was making no such demands upon those who came to faith in Christ, and so they had no justification to do so either. God had made it clear when bringing Peter to Cornelius, that the Jewish attitude toward the Gentiles had to change, yet we can see from both the attitude at Jerusalem and from that in Galatia that some things change very slowly.

4. And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage:

It is important to note that this does not break from the text just before it: it is all part of the same situation – a further development of the same thought. We have here Paul's evaluation of those in Jerusalem who raised their voices in an effort to compel the Gentiles to be circumcised and to keep the Law of Moses in order to be saved. They are called false brethren, *pseudadelphos* (*psyoo-dad'-el-fos*), literally an untrue or false brother.¹³ This is “one who ostentatiously professes to be a Christian, but is destitute of Christian knowledge and piety.”¹⁴ When Paul rehearsed to the Corinthians the many trials and hardships that he had endured for the sake of the Gospel, he included in the listing the danger that he faced from *false brethren* (2 Corinthians 11:26). We have already seen that Paul's life had been in danger from the Jews of Damascus (Acts 9:23) and from the Hellenistic Jews of Jerusalem (Acts 9:29). Paul does not speak of these false brethren posing a physical threat to him but they were seeking to undo his work.

The phrase, *unawares brought in*, is actually only one word in the Greek – *pareisaktos* (*par-ice'-ak-tos*), and means to be smuggled in or to be joined under false pretenses.¹⁵ What is evident, but we might not catch it at first glance, is that these *false brethren* were included without anyone being aware of their hidden agenda – they were secretly included. This means that there were men among the believers in Jerusalem who did not appreciate the freedom in Christ that was being proclaimed among the Gentiles – those who desired everyone to hold to their familiar Jewish lifestyle and exclude the Gentiles unless they were circumcised and kept the Jewish Laws. Acts 15:5 identifies these, who voiced their objections to the Gospel message that Paul was bringing to the Gentiles, as believers from among the sect of the Pharisees – those whom Paul calls *false brethren*. The difficulty that the Galatians were facing (and which Paul is writing to correct) is the same problem that these men in Jerusalem had – they were replacing the purity of the Gospel message with a hybrid that included the practices of Judaism; something that Paul has identified as “another [a different] gospel, which is not another [of the same kind]” (Galatians 1:6-7).¹⁶ What is equally evident is that the leaders in Jerusalem did not quash this backward thinking because they were not sufficiently convinced that the Gospel was truly open to all of the Gentiles. Peter may well have been led by the Lord to Cornelius, but it seems that this venture was considered to be a one-time event and no one was persuaded that this was to become the norm. Incredibly, the

¹³ Strong's Dictionary.

¹⁴ Strong's Online.

¹⁵ Friberg Lexicon.

¹⁶ Ibid.

very men who were probably Paul's companions in the school of Gamaliel were now those who opposed him; the traditions and laws that were formerly Paul's very life and at which he had excelled above all of his companions, now proved to be a source of grief to him (1:14). This is not uncommon, and easily understood if you pause to consider that the influence behind those who profess, but do not possess, is Satan. As long as you are going along with things as they are (the area of departure from the truth of the Scriptures does not matter), you will have little or no opposition. However, when your eyes are opened to the truth that God has in His Word, then the scene will change quite rapidly to one of conflict and even hostility at every turn. As I reflect on my time at Briercrest Biblical Seminary, everything went smoothly as long as I embraced Evangelicalism, but when I began to turn to the Truth of Scripture, my difficulties began. Satan loves to include enough religion in a person's life to salve the conscience, but not enough to bring a desire for the truth. The father of lies will abide a half-truth (because it still bears his influence), but he cannot stand the pure truth.

These false brethren came in *privily*, i.e., stealthily,¹⁷ and they came with a purpose. Satan always has a purpose in what he does and it is never good. They came to *spy*, or to "search out with a view to overthrowing."¹⁸ Undoubtedly, these men had heard about the freedom in Christ that Paul was preaching to the Gentiles, and their sole purpose in attending this rehearsal of all that God had been doing was to bring pressure to bear upon Paul to change his Message. These men came into the



assembly stating that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic Law, yet Paul uses this strong word to describe their purpose. If there is one thing that Paul is desperately trying to get the Galatians to understand, it is this: by seeking to make Jewish practices an integral part of their faith, they were in the process of transposing, or substituting, a false gospel for the true Gospel of God (Galatians 1:6-7). What we must not miss is the **narrow** definition of God's truth; Jesus said: "I am the way, the truth, and the life: **no man cometh unto the Father, but by me**" (John 14:6). Evangelicals today would seek to convince everyone that there is room for variations in understanding God's ways, and so we find those who are promoting Evangelicals and Catholics, Evangelicals and Mormons, Evangelicals and Muslims, and Evangelicals and anything but the narrow truth of God's Word. In fact, the Evangelical Free Church (EFC) pioneers permitted a significant diversity in beliefs based upon this stated premise: "if Scripture alone is the rule, and Scripture is open to various interpretations, and believers are free in conscience to interpret as they feel 'led' by the Holy Spirit, it follows that they may be led to different views."¹⁹ What is stunning is that these *pioneers* held such a flawed view of both the Scriptures and the Spirit of God as to arrive at such a nebulous conclusion. It is no wonder that the EFC has long since forsaken any semblance of holding to the narrow Message of the Scriptures in order to ride high on the wave of Ecumenism.

Satan's tactics are not new, and he demonstrated an ability to mix truth and error from the very beginning. Jesus described him as one in whom there is no truth; he is the father of lies (John 8:44). Because there is no truth in him, he cannot abide the pure truth, and everything that he touches becomes corrupted. This is why Timothy is exhorted to be careful, to "take heed unto thyself, and

¹⁷ Strong's Online.

¹⁸ Vine's, "spy."

¹⁹ David V. Martin, Trinity International University 1897-1997, p. 19.

unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (1 Timothy 4:16) – and we must do not less. Jesus identified the way of life as being narrow, and said that there would be few who would find it (Matthew 7:14). There are no variations from the Word of God for “The words of the LORD *are* pure [clean] words: *as* silver tried in a furnace of earth, purified seven times” (Psalm 12:6).²⁰ “Thy word *is* very [exceedingly] pure [refined]: therefore thy servant loveth it” (Psalm 119:140)²¹; this is a very different testimony than that given by the founders of the EFC. The Word of God must be our focus, we must not deviate from it and we must weigh all things against it; we must not add anything to it, nor take anything away from it (Deuteronomy 4:2; 12:32; Revelation 22:18). However, this is precisely what the critical thinkers have done in producing the Greek text that underlies modern translations of the Bible: they produced a corrupted text – one that has both added to and taken away from the preserved text of God’s Word. This, in turn, opened the door to produce a plethora of translations that have resulted in an increased confusion in the minds of most Evangelicals today and has served to undermine the authority of the Scriptures. Satan’s tactic in all of this is to provide a text that may retain a measure of truth, but which is mixed with sufficient changes to place a question mark over the whole matter of Biblical inerrancy and authority. Once this has taken place, the Scriptures are no longer a rule for life, and Satan has gained a huge victory in the lives of those who should know better; the “thus saith the Lord” now carries with it a doubt that renders it, “yea, hath God said?” (Genesis 3:1).

These *false brethren* entered in to overthrow the freedom that is in Christ Jesus. Paul is very pointed in his explanation of what these, of the sect of the Pharisees, were seeking to do among the believers in Jerusalem; once again, he uses the activities that took place in Jerusalem as a means to emphasize to the Galatians how close they were coming to losing their grasp of the truth. By attempting to impose the Mosaic laws and circumcision upon Gentile believers, they were essentially trying to bring them back under bondage to the Mosaic Law. When Paul preached at Antioch in Pisidia, he declared: “Be it known unto you therefore, men *and* brethren, that through this man [Jesus] is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses” (Acts 13:38-39). The Message that God had given to Paul was one of liberation from the Law of Moses through faith in the finished work of Christ. The Greek word translated as *bondage* means to enslave utterly.²² This is an intensive word and speaks of something that is far beyond merely being subject to something. Bring to mind, at this point, two things: 1) Paul has already identified these men as seeking to overthrow their freedom in Christ (*spy out*), and 2) he has clarified that the Galatians were about to exchange the true Gospel for a message that was not the Gospel at all. Could this situation have been running through Peter’s mind when he wrote, “For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known *it*, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them” (2 Peter 2:20-21)? The gravity of the situation is evident; these men in Jerusalem (and among the Galatian believers) were endeavoring to replace the Message of freedom in Christ with a false gospel that would bring

²⁰ Strong’s Online.

²¹ Ibid.

²² Strong’s Dictionary.

absolute enslavement and death; they were seeking to draw the freed-ones back under the yoke of slavery to an order that had been ended in Christ. The warning is: take heed (1 Timothy 4:16)!

5. To whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

We come now to where Paul draws his experience in Jerusalem together with his exhortation to the Galatians.

To whom refers to the false brethren who sought to overthrow the freedom that is found in Christ Jesus, those who sought to cling to the bondage of Judaism. *We* would refer to the delegation from Antioch, sent to Jerusalem to defend the message of the Gospel as given through Paul – namely, those who understood the full Message that God had for all people, a Message that the Jews of Jerusalem had evidently not yet fully understood. Paul, and company, did not yield (*gave place*) by submitting to (*subjection*) what these false brethren proclaimed, not even for *an hour*. The thrust of this is that Paul was not swayed in any way to surrender to their demand that all Christians submit to circumcision and the Mosaic ordinances and traditions. Surely, as Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he would have had this situation in mind: “... That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive ...” (Ephesians 4:14). We must be strongly founded upon the teachings of Scripture recognizing that there will always be those who will seek to lure us away from God’s pure Word. Again, we must be reminded to hold to the pure doctrine (2 Timothy 1:13) and avoid everyone who would seek to compromise its truth in any way (Romans 16:17-18). This is perhaps the greatest problem within the Evangelical community today – generally speaking, they are so completely ignorant of the Word of God that they are no match for those who come along with high-sounding words. We live in a day when there is a smorgasbord of theologies to choose from – it is a matter of finding one that fits what you want out of life; Christianity has become a self-centered religion, custom-designed by Satan to deceive the very elect, those who are in Christ and should know better (Matthew 24:24)!

The purpose that Paul gives for taking a strong stand against these Judaizers is that the truth of the true Gospel might *remain permanently* with the Galatians and with us.²³ Paul’s stand against this error was another step taken in the preservation of the Word of God. This is something that the higher critics of the Scriptures will never acknowledge, and, therefore, they seek all kinds of external resources to verify the veracity of the Word of God. Jesus said: “... it is easier for heaven and earth to pass [to perish], than one tittle of the law to fail” (Luke 16:17).²⁴ The Psalmist declared: “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psalm 119:89); Isaiah wrote: “The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever” (Isaiah 40:8). Peter identified the preserved Word with the Gospel: “But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you” (1 Peter 1:25). Clearly, the Psalmist, Peter and the Lord Jesus Christ had no difficulty understanding that our God-given Scriptures are also kept in His mighty power. If we could grasp that the Lord Jesus Christ is the

²³ Strong’s Online.

²⁴ Ibid.

Word of God come in the flesh, then we would have less difficulty accepting God's promised preservation of the Bible. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. ... And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us ..." (John 1:1-2, 14). What we have recorded and preserved for us is the only revelation of Jesus, the eternal Word, that second Person of the Trinity. We find the promise of His coming as Redeemer in Genesis, we see the fulfillment of all things in Him in the final passages of Revelation and, in between, we see God revealing His grace to fallen mankind, always looking forward to the Promised One Who would come to take away the sins of the world. Our Scriptures do not contain the complete revelation of Jesus Christ (John 21:25), but they contain what God has determined to be what we need, and, because it is a revelation of the eternal Son of God, it only follows that it will be preserved and continue to stand long after the worlds have passed away. In many ways, the higher critics have the same purpose as the Judaizers of Paul's day: they are seeking to overthrow the authority of the Word of God and the faith of all those who are established in the faith of Christ alone. We must be alert, and recognize their tentacles in the errors that we face every day; we see their influence in the theologies defended by the learned and in the proliferation of translations and paraphrases available today, which do not spring from God's preserved text of Scripture.

Paul declares here that he stood against the Judaizers so that the Truth might remain permanently established with those to whom he preached the Gospel of God. Paul rejected the bondage of Judaism so that the God-given truth of the Gospel might prevail, yet he found those among the Galatians who sought to undermine what he had defended in Jerusalem before the Jewish leaders. He is saying that their position was wrong then, and it is still wrong now – the question for the Galatians, and for us today, is this: why are you permitting yourselves to be deceived into following a message that is not God's pure Truth? In reality, there have always been those who "will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables" (2 Timothy 4:3-4). We must be vigilant lest we find ourselves caught in the snare of their positive-only, hybrid-blend of lies and enough truth to be deceiving.

6. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed *to be somewhat* in conference added nothing to me:

Paul now refers to those among the dissenters who were of some reputation; they *seemed to be somewhat*. There were among those who sought to cling to the Jewish ways, some who were held in high regard; perhaps even some among the Apostles saw the need to hold tenaciously to the old ways. We do know that Peter had great difficulty getting past the fact that God had removed the separation between Jew and Gentile. The Lord gave him a vision, took him to Cornelius, and then gave those Gentiles the gift of languages to prove to Peter (and those who were with him) that the way for the Gentiles had been opened – things were no longer as they had always been.

Seemed, used twice in this verse, is exactly the same Greek word translated as *reputation* in verse two. Paul declares that it does not matter to him what they were, whether held in high regard or not, it made no difference; he knew that God is not influenced by anyone's outward appearance.

We may appear to be many things to many people, but God knows the heart: “I the LORD search [investigate, explore] the heart [the seat of knowledge, thinking], I try [examine, prove] the reins [kidneys, the seat of emotions, affections] ...” (Jeremiah 17:10);²⁵ the Lord is the only One Who has access to the inner thoughts and motivations of a person. The prophet Samuel was reminded of this as he sought for the Lord’s anointed from among Jesse’s sons (1 Samuel 16:7). As Paul presented the Gospel, which he had been preaching to the Gentiles, to the leaders in Jerusalem, he was confident that he was not on trial – the Lord had revealed the Message to him that he was to take to the world, and, in that, he was secure. Perhaps the Jewish leaders within Jerusalem felt that Paul was there to have them evaluate the Gospel message that he was preaching, and either accept, modify, or reject it; Paul was under no such impression. He preached the pure Word of God, and was incensed that anyone would try to mix it with anything else.

Unfortunately, we live in a day when the error of the Jews of Jerusalem is being repeated. Oh, we may not be under pressure to return to the ordinances and regulations of Moses; the error might not be the same in kind, but it is the same in principle. The Jews of Paul’s day were steeped in the doctrines of the Jewish faith, and their religious traditions demanded that they have nothing to do with the unclean Gentiles. Now they were faced with a doctrine that called them to set aside some of what they had learned and consider a new way. Today, Baptists and Evangelicals of all stripes cling to what makes them unique; even with the massive shift into Ecumenism, their unique traditions are carefully maintained, and they have learned to ignore that with which they’re not familiar and still embrace one another as fellow Christians; within the diverse Ecumenical movement, there is an accommodation of such differences. However, if you approach any within this group (and sadly, many “Fundamental Baptists” are not much different) with a Biblical position that is contrary to their theology, they will immediately dismiss you; their accommodation has bred a strong tolerance for almost anything except the pure truth of God’s Word. If the Message that you bring is not in keeping with their theology or within the parameters of their tolerance, you will be set aside as holding little relevance to them. If you embrace a Biblical position that is in opposition to that held by any of their stalwarts, you are very likely to be branded as a narrow-minded legalist and sent packing. We have yet to learn the lesson that we are not to look to our carefully designed theologies, but to God’s Word and His desire that we live in accordance with what He has given to us.

However, as in Paul’s day, this is not a common or popular theme today. “Pastors,” particularly those who are Independent Baptists, are more concerned about maintaining their position within their congregation than almost anything else. They see their role as being solidly Biblical, even though they have never, personally, taken the time to weigh their theologies against the Word of God (they have been led through a “Scriptural” basis for their theology – and that is something that is remarkably different), and, by concluding that their positions are Biblical, they place themselves above reproach. This is not unlike the leaders of the assemblies in Judea who also would have considered their understanding to be Biblical; the believers who were of the sect of the Pharisees would not have voiced their objection (Acts 15:5) if they had not felt very comfortable that they were Biblically correct. They were Jews by conviction, and only sought to retain some of their familiar practices that bolstered their Jewishness. Today we hear of those who are Baptists by conviction, or those who are longstanding members of the Evangelical Free Church, and, by hoisting these tattered-excuses as flags of identification, they will utterly reject

²⁵ Strong’s Online.

Biblical teaching because what they hear does not agree with their traditions. They may never admit to such, but that makes what they hear no less true.

Paul speaks here of those who were of reputation, and clarifies that this mattered not one iota to him; his focus was on the Message and the doctrine, and the necessity of it lining up with the Scriptures. For the most part, we see little concern today for the teachings of the Word of God – typically the average Evangelical only tries to stay in line with his denominational position, which, as a rule, permits him a great deal of latitude. This is not unlike the Jew of Paul’s day; they, too, were concerned that they not depart from what they had been taught. However, as soon as these people are confronted with a truly Biblical position (whether the Judaizers of Paul’s day or the Evangelicals of today), they will not look beyond their group’s documents (if they look that far) to determine if they will accept what you say, or not. Today, it would be more common for an Evangelical to limit his reference to what his favorite theologian or preacher says on the matter; their cry would be: “I am of Warren,” “I am of Graham,” or, perhaps the more conservative would say, “I am of MacArthur” (cf. 1 Corinthians 1:12). We have entered an era where it is not really expected that anyone should try to understand the Scriptures; such heavy religious thinking is left to the experts – those highly educated and acclaimed doctors of theology who have the required intelligence to interpret the Word of God for us. This is reflective of the Roman Catholic Church, which traditionally has withheld the Scriptures from their people (and to a very large degree from their own bishops), lest someone arrive at an understanding that is contrary to the Church’s doctrinal position; they limit the interpretation of Scripture to those within the upper hierarchy of the Church. The Galatians suffered from the same dementia; when Jews from Jerusalem said that they needed to add circumcision and the ordinances of the Law of Moses to their faith, they were ready to make the change. Paul tells them that they are about to transpose error for the truth of God, they are about to forsake the pure truth and embrace a deadly mixture of truth and error (which is only a more deceptive form of error), and they are about to turn away from Christ as their Redeemer. The matter was very serious for them, and it is equally as serious for us – there is a pervading ignorance of what God desires for those who want to walk in His ways, and, unfortunately, the truth will not be heard from the learned men of reputation.



LA Crusade 2004

Today we have men who are held in high regard – men who should have a Message of life and faith in Christ, but many of whom provide a deadly concoction of truth and error (it may not be the same mixture as what the Galatians were being fed, but the results are the same). Perhaps the most famous example is the late Billy Graham; during his lifetime he has caused irreparable damage in the hearts and lives of those whom he professed to draw to faith in Christ. Evangelicals today have grown up venerating this man, and most, without looking into the matter, will attribute multiplied thousands of converts to his crusade ministry; he is the *pope* of Evangelicalism who can do no wrong. With such a “tremendous” track record, how could anyone who considers himself to be a Christian do anything other than praise the man? However, what anyone will find if he is prepared to look, is that from the earliest days of his crusade ministry, Billy Graham turned all of his “converts” back to the denominations from which they came. If they were Roman Catholics before the meeting, they were directed to go back to the Catholic Church for follow-up after the meeting; if Greek Orthodox, or United Church, or Anglican or Lutheran, it mattered not – each one was encouraged to return to his or her own denomination. Graham was a significant contributor to the

rapid spread of Ecumenical thinking, for he was declaring for everyone to see that all denominations were equally acceptable in God's eyes. Therefore, even if (and that little word "if" is deliberately included) Billy Graham preached a message that was true to the Word of God, anyone who came forward for salvation would have been sent back to their own denomination, no matter how corrupt it was. He was saying, in essence, that it is acceptable to take the salvation that Christ offers and add it to whatever you are familiar with, and that is okay. Paul declares so plainly in this letter that it cannot be this way. If you wave a red flag regarding the teaching and practices of Billy Graham today, you will very quickly lose your audience. We see Paul, Peter and James facing those in Jerusalem who sought to include keeping the ordinances of Moses with their faith in Christ, and Peter and James had to agree that this should not be required of Gentile believers (Acts 15:19), yet we find the Galatian believers caught in this very error. Nothing has changed in two thousand years except the content and context of the error.

Returning to our verse, Paul states very clearly that those with whom he conferred while he was in Jerusalem *added nothing* to the Message that he had received of God for the world. *Conference*, as used in this verse, is exactly the same Greek word that is found in Galatians 1:16 where Paul made it very clear that he *conferred not* with anyone. If we consider these two comments together, we see that Paul did not confer with men when he received the message of the Gospel from God, and we see here that after laying before the Jewish leaders the Gospel that he had been preaching, they added nothing to the Message. The Gospel that Paul was preaching to anyone who would listen, was the complete and true Gospel – there was nothing missing, and nothing to be added! The word that Paul and Barnabas preached to the Galatians on their journey through that area, was the pure Gospel; it was in need of nothing! This presents a strong argument against what the Galatians were doing; within the Message that Paul delivered, there was no room for reverting to the traditions of Moses – for mixing truth with error. How could the traditions of Moses, which were received from God, be considered error? Paul very carefully explained to the Ephesians how these traditions had been ended at the cross of Christ (Ephesians 2:14-16), and what God has ended we must not seek to perpetuate. As we will see, there was not only no room for such, but adding these Jewish traditions undermined the very truth of God's Message.

7. But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as *the gospel* of the circumcision *was* unto Peter;

This reflects a very astute summary of the position of the Jewish leaders of Jerusalem. James declared the compromise that they were prepared to put forward: "Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world. Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble [harass further] not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God: But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and *from* fornication, and *from* things strangled, and *from* blood. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day" (Acts 15:18-21).²⁶ If you consider this carefully, it appears that they have not given anything away – the focus of this judgment is on the Gentile believers. They are permitting the Gentiles to remain as they were when they turned to the Lord (they were suspending the demand

²⁶ Strong's Dictionary.

that they be circumcised). However, they were still holding strongly to the teachings of Moses, for James included the comment that Moses was being preached in the synagogues of all cities every week (Acts 15:21) – if these Gentile converts wanted to learn about Moses’ Laws, there was ample access for them.

The letter, which they wrote to the believers in Antioch, did not contain this comment regarding Moses, but neither did it contain a condemnation of those trying to impose the ordinances of Moses and circumcision upon Gentile believers (Acts 15:23-29). The closest that they came is recorded in verse 24: “Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting [literally, to pack up baggage; within a military context it meant to plunder a town²⁷ – thereby indicating the damage that was being done] your souls, saying, *Ye must* be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no *such* commandment”²⁸ They acknowledge that the men who were causing the strife in Antioch did come from them, but they deny sending them with that message. What is not declared openly, but which we can glean from the overall tone of this chapter of Acts, is that the Jewish Christians around Jerusalem were just that – Jewish Christians; by example, they were showing that the traditions of Moses and the rite of circumcision were still of value. The product of the conference in Jerusalem was that the Gentiles would no longer be held to their Jewish standards; it was a compromise that “permitted” Paul to continue to preach the Gospel message, which the Lord had given to him, without interference (at least officially) from the Jewish believers. The old saying, a man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still, seems to fit this situation very well; the Jews, unarguably, were forced to accept the Gospel that had been committed to Paul as being genuine and pure, yet their wills had not made the change. Despite the lesson that God had brought to Peter through the household of Cornelius, they seemed, for the most part, to remain unconvinced that the traditions of the Jews were fulfilled, completed, and done away with in Christ (Ephesians 2:15).

In our verse, Paul indicates that the leaders in Jerusalem realized that he had been given a Message for the Gentiles, and they had to admit that it was a pure Message. However, it is also clear that they were not prepared to accept the Gospel that Paul was preaching and apply it to themselves. Their conclusion was that Paul had been entrusted with the Gospel to the Gentiles, and Peter to the Jews; the rut of Judaism ran too deeply for such a massive paradigm shift so quickly. Even as Peter penned his second epistle, he still admitted that there were many things that Paul taught that were difficult to understand (2 Peter 3:16).

8. (For he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles:)

This is a restatement of the previous verse. Even as God expressed His power at work through Peter to those of the circumcision (the Jews), so this same God also expressed His power through Paul to the Gentiles (the heathen). The words *wrought effectually* and *mighty* come from exactly the same word in the Greek; *energeo*, to be at work: God was working through both Peter

²⁷ Strong’s Online.

²⁸ Ibid.

and Paul.²⁹ What Paul wants these Galatians to understand is that God was not biased toward the Message of Peter to the Jews over the Message that Paul had been given for all of mankind. Somehow, the Galatian believers had been persuaded, or were being persuaded, that the Gospel message as found among the Jews was superior to what they had received through Paul and Barnabas. However, Paul is building his case that this is not the situation at all; the dichotomy was due to the Jerusalem believers being unwilling to accept that their Jewish traditions had been fulfilled, abolished, and done away with in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 2:15).

9. And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

*P*illars is a word that is used to refer to a “column supporting the weight of a building,” and, within our context, would speak of those who were the primary elders within the Jerusalem assembly.³⁰ Once again, we have that word *seemed* that, as we have previously noted, speaks of having a reputation (which may or may not be factual). What is interesting is that Paul never declares these men to be the pillars, nor does he say that he went to those in Jerusalem who were the leaders, but to those who were “of reputation” (2:2). There could be a couple of reasons for this. First of all, Paul does not want to ascribe undue prestige to these men, for, although the elders of an assembly bear a greater responsibility than the others, they do not hold an elevated position. Secondly, although these men were the reputed pillars of the assembly and were looked to for leadership, they were in error on this important matter of what the Lord had really accomplished through His death, burial and resurrection. Even though, by all appearances, they were the elders responsible for holding to the purity of doctrine, they had failed on this occasion.

As Paul penned this letter to the Galatians and recalled the situation when he had faced those of reputation among the elders of Jerusalem, he undoubtedly recognized the fruit of their failure to deal decisively and properly with the problem of mixing Jewish traditions with the Gospel. Could it be that these leaders were not exercising Biblically based discernment in dealing with the Judaizers? Although elders do not hold positional authority, they do hold the much greater responsibility of leading by example; even a cursory review of First Timothy 3 and Titus 1 will reveal this. Two verses in Hebrews 13 are often used to support the concept of positional authority within a church (namely, the ultimate authority of the pastor), yet they actually speak of the very same exemplary leadership responsibility. “Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow ...” (Hebrews 13:7); then: “Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls ...” (Hebrews 13:17). We have here the nuts and bolts of what the Independent Baptists like to use as their basis for pastoral authority. However, careful consideration of the terms used here quickly unravels any such authoritative control – something that they are not prepared to do lest they be forced to undo some of their Baptist theology. First, the word *rule* means *to lead, to go before*,³¹ and has absolutely nothing to do with pastoral control. This has everything to do with the responsibility of the elders

²⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

³⁰ Vine’s “pillar.”

³¹ Strong’s Online.

to lead their assembly by example in the ways of truth and correct doctrine (1 Peter 5:1-3; 1 Timothy 4:16); as Paul dealt with the Jerusalem leaders, this was an area of failure. They were not prepared to denounce the retention of the Mosaic traditions and, thereby, it became a snare within their assembly, and a stumbling block to others. By example, the leaders of Jerusalem were supporting the preservation of the very traditions that had been fulfilled and abolished in Christ. Secondly, the *obey* of Hebrews 13:17 means *to be persuaded*, which agrees completely with John's exhortation that we are to *try the spirits*; we are to test to ensure that those who are in leadership adhere to the Word of God (1 John 4:1). If we give this careful consideration, we might remember that Jesus said: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25-28). Jesus made it abundantly clear that there was to be no hierarchical authority within the assembly, contrary to what we see today – particularly within the Independent Baptist movement, and perfected within the Roman Catholic Church. What Paul experienced at Jerusalem was the influence of those of reputation – everyone was following their example, and no one was testing their teaching to ensure that it was in line with the Word of God. The reputed leaders failed to recognize God's fulfillment of the Mosaic ordinances, and the people of Jerusalem followed them without weighing their position against the Scriptures – a double failure.

Were these Judaizers using the traditions of Moses in order to draw closer to God? Since Christ had already come, this would have been impossible. All of these traditions had been fulfilled and done away with through the redemption accomplished by Christ, Who died once for all time (Hebrews 9:28). No, these were traditions with which they were comfortable; they grew up with them and were reluctant to give them up (Acts 15:1-3, 5). If they had searched their Scriptures, they would have recognized that the Lord took pleasure in none of these traditions; God set them in place through Moses in order to instill in the hearts of Israel a fear of the Lord God and to provide them with an understanding of His holiness – a holiness that they were to reflect. The Mosaic Laws were intended to make Israel a kingdom of priests and a holy nation (Exodus 19:6) until Messiah came to establish a New Covenant with Israel (Jeremiah 31:31-33) – a Covenant that was implemented by Jesus Christ with His disciples (Luke 22:20). Isaiah, if they had taken the time to ponder his warnings, identified the futility of perpetuating empty rituals (Isaiah 1:10-17). The Lord declared through Isaiah, "Bring no more vain oblations [empty offerings]; incense is an abomination unto me; the new moons and sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with [I cannot endure]; *it is* iniquity [or, idolatry], even the solemn meeting" (Isaiah 1:13).³² What the Lord so clearly condemned within Israel of old, the Jews of this day were seeking to perpetuate – empty rituals. However, this time the rituals were empty because they had been fulfilled in Christ (not because they were carried out without faith in the Lord); they were never meant to be anything more than a shadow of things to come (Colossians 2:17). "For he [Christ] is our peace, who hath made both one [the Jew and the Gentile], and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having **abolished in his flesh the enmity**, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace ..." (Ephesians 2:14-15). What the Jews needed to recognize, more than anything else, was that Christ had made an end of their familiar Jewish rituals.

³² Strong's Online.

We read that Peter, James and John gave Paul and Barnabas the *right hands of fellowship*; they gave them their approval. They determined that there was nothing to be changed regarding the Message that Paul and Barnabas were proclaiming. However, it was a guarded approval – you go to the heathen, and we’ll go to the Jews. By doing this, they would be able to retain their traditions and customs without any difficulty, for they would be working among their own people. What they did not foresee was the very problem that Paul now faced in the midst of the Galatian believers. By carrying on with their Jewish practices, the leaders of Jerusalem permitted the Christians within their community to develop the error of holding to both the Gospel of Christ and the traditions of Moses. Although the leaders reluctantly agreed not to hold the Gentiles to this practice, others came to see this as the correct way, and so determined to convince the Galatians. What had become normal practice within the assembly of Jerusalem, Paul called a different gospel – one that was not of the same kind as what had been given to the assemblies in Galatia by Paul and Barnabas (Galatians 1:6-7). Although Jerusalem assembly may have begun well, their traditions took over their hearts and they made them a part of the Gospel message – hence, the error! “Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath *days* [literally, *sabbaths*, there is no definite article in the Greek]: Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body *is* of Christ” (Colossians 2:16-17).³³ Paul elaborated on this in Romans 14:14-15, the essence of which is: don’t do anything that will cause a brother to stumble in his walk with the Lord. By holding onto their Jewish traditions, the reputed leaders in Jerusalem led others to conclude that the faith of Christ and the Jewish traditions together formed the Gospel message. However, Paul has made it abundantly clear in this epistle, that this is not the Gospel, but something else altogether. How carefully we need to walk lest we unwittingly approve error in the eyes of those who do not fully comprehend God’s call on our lives. Perhaps a fitting example of this would be how we approach what is known as the “Christmas season,” something that is delved into with great enthusiasm but which bears a greater influence from paganism than anything that could be construed as being Biblical. Do we hold to truth during this worldly festive time or do we join in the celebrations that flow out of the worship of the pagan sun-gods? Perhaps if we understood that the “reason for the season” is not the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ but the re-birth of the sun-gods of various pagan cultures, we might be more inclined to set the festivities aside. We, like the Jews of Paul’s day, need to look more to the Scriptures and less to the culture around us.

*The Law of Moses
ended at the cross!*

10. Only *they would* that we should remember the poor; the same which I also was forward to do.

It is interesting that the KJV follows the pattern of the Bishop’s Bible (one of the reference Bibles used in the translation) by placing a period at the end of verse nine, thereby inserting a break in thought. However, all of the older translations that I checked (including Wycliffe, Coverdale, Geneva, and Tyndale), did not show such a significant break. Robert Young’s Literal translation

³³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

ends verse nine with a comma, which supports the other old translations by drawing verses nine and ten together.

The difficulty that we face as we consider this verse is that we often look for the parallel to it within the documented letter that was sent to the Antioch Christians by the leadership of the Jerusalem assembly (Acts 15:23-29). However, if we pause for a moment, we will realize that the thrust of this verse is directed at Paul and Barnabas, and not the Gentile Christians in general. In all likelihood, this was an admonition given by the Jerusalem leadership to Paul and Barnabas as they gave to them their “right hands of fellowship.” We do see that on more than one occasion Paul was instrumental in sending support to the believers in the Jerusalem area. Acts 11:28-30 speaks of the famine that hit the whole world, and relief was sent to the Christians in Jerusalem by the hands of Paul and Barnabas (which would have taken place before this meeting). We read of similar occasions in Romans 15:25-26 and 1 Corinthians 16:1-3. This confirms Paul’s words here that he was indeed diligent (*forward*) in providing for the poor.

I will readily admit that I puzzled over this verse for some time. When I hit such occasions, I will consult with commentaries to see what others have said on the matter. It was interesting to note that most commentators agreed that Galatians 2 fits the best with Acts 15 as they are dealing with the same issue of drawing Jewish traditions into Christianity. However, when it came to this verse specifically, either they would make no comment at all or they ignored the direct correlation that they’d made between Galatians 2 and Acts 15, and related this verse to Acts 11. It appears to me that the leaders of Jerusalem had nothing to add to what Paul was preaching, but, rather than remain speechless, they exhorted Paul and Barnabas (as preachers to the Gentiles) to not forsake the poor. As already noted, this was something in which Paul and Barnabas had already been involved – and to Jerusalem, no less; something of which James, Peter and John should have been fully aware.

11. But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withstood him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

Paul now launches into a significant teaching section using the actions of Peter as the springboard – and, as we can see from this verse, it was not a positive example either. You will recall from our study so far, that the Jews of Jerusalem were having great difficulty getting beyond the traditions of Judaism, and Peter was no exception to this, even though the Lord had given him the vision of the sheet and specifically sent him to the Gentile, Cornelius (Acts 10). You will recall that Peter defended himself before the Jerusalem assembly (Acts 11:2-4, 18) regarding this matter, perhaps before the same people who declared that the Gentiles needed to be circumcised and keep the ordinances of Moses (when Paul and Barnabas arrived from Antioch – Acts 15:5). However, through all of this, it seems that Peter was still not completely convinced that the Gospel was now free of the old circumcision and ordinances of Moses. It was probably far easier to work with the Jews of Jerusalem if you left their traditional practices alone; after all, the traditions had been given by God to their father Abraham and to Moses, and so they must still be necessary. The traditions may not have been the core of the doctrine that they taught, but it is very evident that they were not teaching that these things were no longer of any spiritual value.

Our verse speaks of a time when Peter came to Antioch – a time that is not spoken of in Acts; it does not appear to be when the letter of concession was sent to the Gentiles in Antioch, for that was sent by Judas and Silas (Acts 15:32). Perhaps Peter came to Antioch to view firsthand the work and ministry in which Paul was involved. We are told that Paul opposed (*withstood*) him in person; he did not cut him down behind his back but, rather, dealt with the problem head on. Too often we disagree with someone to other people, and the person to whom we are opposed will never know unless it comes back to him by way of gossip. If we do not have the courage to face the individual with the problem, then it is better not to say anything than to attack him through the avenue of public opinion (gossip). We must always ensure that the rebuke, or correction, matches the context of the offense. Jesus said: “... if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother” (Matthew 18:15). Notice, the offense is against an individual – therefore, the rebuke and first attempt at reconciliation is made on the same basis. The passage in Matthew goes on to tell us that if we are unsuccessful, then we are to try again with a few others to bear witness of the response, and, if that is unsuccessful, then the matter is to go before the assembly. There is a prescribed process for dealing with sin, and we must be slow to bring the error of others to the attention of everyone. However, as we see demonstrated on this occasion, when there has been a public offense (a sin against everyone), then that sin must be dealt with publicly. The error of Peter was not against Paul personally, but against all of those who were present and, therefore, Paul’s rebuke was made before everyone.

Blamed, as it is used here, comes from a Greek word that is much stronger than what we would understand from our English; it actually means that Peter is to be condemned.³⁴ If we have not recognized, to this point, how serious Paul saw the problem of adding Jewish traditions to the Gospel, it should very shortly become perfectly clear that this was totally unacceptable.

12. For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles: but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.

James was the leader of the assembly in Jerusalem, and here we find a group coming from Jerusalem to Antioch, again. The last time that such a group arrived in Antioch, it resulted in a delegation going down to Jerusalem to resolve the matter of whether the Gentiles should be required to be circumcised and keep the Mosaic ordinances. Now, however, it seems that their agitation was of a different sort.

Peter had evidently gone to Antioch alone, that is, he was not part of a larger group from Jerusalem that arrived later. Before this group came from Jerusalem, Peter had overcome his Jewish fear of the Gentiles and was sitting with them to eat his meals; he was becoming one with the assembly in Antioch. However, when these Jewish Christians arrived on the scene, suddenly Peter felt a little uncomfortable sitting with the Gentiles and withdrew himself from eating with them. The first thing that this tells us is that the Christians from Jerusalem had not changed their ways; they were still incorporating Jewish traditions into their new Christian faith, otherwise, they would have simply sat with the Gentiles for their meals. What evidently took place was that the

³⁴ Strong’s Online.

Jewish Christians sat apart from the Gentiles to eat; they would not mix with the “heathen” – even though they were both redeemed by, and united through, the same blood Sacrifice.

Here is an interesting observation: *fearing* as it is used here (as in Peter *fearing* the Jews) is from exactly the same Greek word as that used in Matthew 14:30 – “But when he saw the wind boisterous, he was afraid” Peter’s fear in observing the storm as he walked on the water to Jesus was the same “natural” response that he had when in the presence of the Jews from Jerusalem – he feared their reaction should he be seen mingling with the Gentiles. It may well have been a natural response, but it was definitely not spiritual.

We are told that Peter *withdrew* (*hupostello*, *hoop-os-tel'-lo*), which means *to draw back*;³⁵ perhaps a “metaphor from lowering a sail and so slackening the course, and hence of being remiss in holding the truth”³⁶ – a sailing metaphor used against a fisherman, yet it serves to underscore the serious error into which Peter had fallen. We read as well that he *separated* himself, that is, he *set off by boundary* with the purpose of excluding the Gentiles.³⁷ Could there have been an invisible line down the middle of the room – Gentiles there, and Jews over here? It almost seems that marked.

13. And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.

Unfortunately, most times our actions are not carried out in isolation, particularly when we are in error. Peter had a sudden attack of “Jewishitis” when the delegation came from Jerusalem, and he withdrew from eating with the Gentiles. However, once again, Peter led by example and it was not in keeping with the liberating message of the Gospel. The other Jews within the assembly in Antioch began to follow Peter’s lead and separated themselves from the Gentiles as well. It went so far that even Barnabas, the preaching companion of Paul, withdrew and ate with the segregated Jews.

Paul uses some strong language to describe this situation. The words *dissembled* and *dissimulation* are not familiar to us, and, as a result, we can easily miss the thrust of this verse. The Greek word translated as *dissimulation* is *hupokrisis* (*hoop-ok'-ree-sis*), which is most often translated as hypocrisy.³⁸ Paul describes the actions of these Jews, who had been mingling with the Gentiles without difficulty, as hypocrisy – they acted in one manner when it was just the Antioch assembly and in a different way when some Jews came from James. What is clearly evident is that the Jews of Jerusalem were not being taught that the ordinances of Moses were fulfilled and done away with through the finished work of Christ on the cross. These Jews from James were obviously still following their traditions and so they separated themselves from the Gentile Christians to eat their meal – it was their Jewish custom that drew Peter and the other Jews away from what had been their practice up to this time, and therein was their hypocrisy.

³⁵ Strong’s Online.

³⁶ Vine’s “draw.”

³⁷ Strong’s Dictionary.

³⁸ Strong’s Online.

The word *dissembled* is quite similar to *dissimulation* but with one slight difference. It means, “to join in acting the hypocrite.”³⁹ The other Jews joined Peter in acting the hypocrite; Peter was the first hypocrite, all the rest proved to be copy-hypocrites. Although all were guilty of being hypocritical in this situation, it was Peter who started the domino effect, and it was Peter whom Paul saddled with the responsibility for this error. If Peter had stayed the course and continued to eat with the Gentiles, perhaps the Jews from James would have been influenced to set their Mosaic habits aside and join the rest. However, this was not the case.

What is fascinating to realize is that even though the Jews of Jerusalem had granted liberty to the Gentile Christians to be free from following the Mosaic ordinances, they could not bring themselves to live by that same standard. Paul called it hypocrisy – and that would seem to be an appropriate term.

14. But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before *them* all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

The stage has been set, the illustration has been laid out, and now Paul begins to describe the significance of the error. It would seem that the Galatian Christians had had a visit from some of the Christian Jews from Jerusalem as well; in all likelihood, they would be able to relate very specifically to what took place in Antioch and, more importantly, to Paul’s explanation of the failure of these men to understand the reality of the Gospel.

The words *walked uprightly* (which here carry the modifier *not*) come from the Greek *orthopodeo*, which literally is to be straight footed.⁴⁰ The idea is to go directly forward,⁴¹ or to walk in a straight course.⁴² This is what these men were NOT doing, and they were led into this error by Peter. We would do well to carefully ponder Jesus’ words to someone who desired to follow Him: “... Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:61-62). In order to do a proper job of plowing a straight furrow, it is necessary to keep your focus forward, else your furrow will wander; Jesus was making it clear that if we would follow Him, we must focus our eyes ahead so that we will plow a straight furrow. “... let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset *us*, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto [have a singular focus on] Jesus the author and finisher of *our* faith ...” (Hebrews 12:1-2).⁴³ If you begin to look around at other things or back to where you have come from, then your furrow will no longer be straight because you have lost your focus. The Psalmist declared, “Lead me, O LORD, in thy righteousness because of mine enemies; make thy way straight before my face” (Psalm 5:8). What is evident from Scripture is that the way of the Lord is a straight path: “The voice of him that crieth in the

³⁹ Vine’s “dissemble.”

⁴⁰ Strong’s Dictionary.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Strong’s Online.

⁴³ Friberg Lexicon.

wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low: and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: And the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see *it* together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken *it*” (Isaiah 40:3-5; cp. Luke 3:4-5). The Lord will make the crooked straight; crooked is always used to refer to that which is twisted, misshapen, and evil. Deuteronomy 32:4-5 declares the contrast between the Lord and a people who are crooked: “*He is* the Rock, his work *is* perfect: for all his ways *are* judgment [just or right]: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right *is* he. They have corrupted themselves, their spot *is* not *the spot* of his children: *they are* a perverse and crooked generation.”⁴⁴ Paul identifies the path taken by Peter, and all of those who followed his example, as not being straight – or, in other words, it was crooked, or twisted, a departure from the straight path of the Lord.

We see Paul calling Peter to account before all those present; he saw that *they* were departing from the straight path of the Lord, but he holds Peter responsible. Peter’s transgression was against everyone present – he led the Jews, who had been open to the Gentiles, into separating from them; he gave the Judaizers encouragement that they were right in their assessment of the necessity of following the traditions of Moses, and he erred against the Gentiles by giving them the impression that they were second-class Christians. Despite the letter from Jerusalem approving the Gospel that Paul had delivered to these people, they were once again given cause to wonder if anything had changed at all. Paul had already dealt with this issue before the leaders of the Jerusalem assembly, and he was not about to have it undermined.

Paul begins his accusation of Peter by clarifying that Peter, a Jew, was living as a Gentile (i.e., in the freedom of the Gospel of Christ) and not as after the manner of the Jews (subject to the Mosaic traditions) before they received company from Jerusalem – he felt free to fellowship with the Gentile Christians. The Jews (specifically those from around Jerusalem) clung to their Jewish customs and traditions, and were not prepared to set them aside – even for the freedom offered in Christ. When Peter first came to Antioch, he entered into that freedom, associating with the Gentiles with no difficulties – he set his Jewish habits aside and, seemingly, broke out of the rut of Judaism. The question that Paul puts to Peter, focuses on the essence of what he had done. By moving over to eat with the Jerusalem Judaizers, Peter was forcing (*compellest*) the Gentiles to live as the Judaizers. The message that was being shouted at these Gentile Christians was that if they wanted to have fellowship with the Jews, they were then going to have to be circumcised and keep the traditions of Moses (Acts 15:5). The very thing that Peter, James and John had faced when Paul and the delegation from Antioch met with them had still not been laid to rest. This is further evidence that the Jews of Jerusalem were not prepared to follow the liberty of the Gospel message that Paul was preaching; they were thoroughly enmeshed in their Jewish traditions, to the point that they held them as being essential to their new life in Christ. No one had the Gentile Christians in a choke-hold forcing them to follow the traditions of Moses, but the wide, empty space between the Gentiles and the Jews during their meal times told them very strongly that, if they wanted to get anywhere as Christians, they were going to have to adopt the practices of the Jews.

15. We *who are* Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

⁴⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

Paul now draws specific attention to those Christians who were Jews by birth, and he is including himself within this group. He is deliberately excluding the Gentile Christians from the thrust of his next comments, those who were still called the “Uncircumcision” by the “Circumcision” of Jerusalem, “aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world” (Ephesians 2:11-12). His focus is on the recipients of the covenant of Moses who have now placed their faith in Jesus Christ as their Messiah and Savior, those who were chosen of old to be a “kingdom of priests” before a fallen world (Exodus 19:6), yet who were now unwilling to fellowship with their Gentile brothers in the Lord.

16. Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Paul declares what the Christian Jews knew but seemed unwilling to practice. They knew that no one is justified, or rendered righteous, by means of keeping the Law. “... by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law *is* the knowledge of sin” (Romans 3:20). What mankind must face, but is often unwilling to accept, is that we are all sinful and helpless to do anything for our own salvation; “... we are all as an unclean *thing*, and all our righteousnesses *are* as filthy rags ...” (Isaiah 64:6) – and that includes both the Jew and the Gentile. Our most righteous acts are worthless before God Who is infinitely holy and just, because they come from a heart that is naturally sinful. It is clear that sinful man can do virtuous acts, yet these are of no value before a righteous God; they cannot purchase a moment of forgiveness or cleansing from Him. The most righteous act carried out by a sinful man is still a filthy garment before the Lord. “Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come,



David Yonggi Cho

and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints” (Revelation 19:7-8). What a contrast! The righteous acts of a sinful man are as filthy rags; the righteousness of the redeemed saints of the Lord appears as clean, white, fine linen, for it is the righteousness of Christ (Titus 3:5). “And he [Abraham] believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness” (Genesis 15:6). The righteousness of the Lord has always come through faith (Hebrews 11 openly declares this reality), through believing God – something that can only be demonstrated by obedience to His instructions (James 2:18).

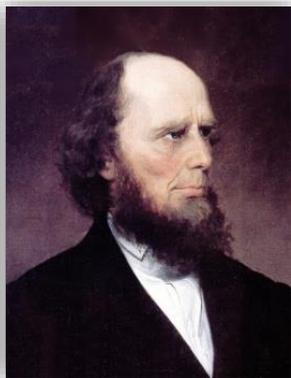
Man’s inborn sinfulness is not a particularly popular topic for discussion today among some groups, and it is often either downplayed or ignored by them. David Cho, for example, leader of the world’s largest liberal, Evangelical church in Seoul, South Korea, believes that we can reach our “unlimited potential,

simply by exercising a positive attitude.”⁴⁵ This has the appearance of filthy rags, and sounds very much like the positive-thinking philosophy of Norman Vincent Peale. Peale openly declared: “It’s not necessary to be born again. You have your way to God, I have mine. I found eternal peace in a Shinto shrine.”⁴⁶ Yet, unfortunately, such heresy did not discourage Billy Graham from stating: “I don’t know anyone who has done more for the kingdom of God than Norman and Ruth Peale, or have meant any more in my life”⁴⁷ Clearly, both Graham and Peale had no qualms about ignoring the clear teachings of the Word of God – a very dangerous move, even though it is not discerned as being such by most Evangelicals.



Norman Vincent

Charles Finney, a well-known preacher of the early 1800s, defined sin as being “the voluntary transgression of a known law;”⁴⁸ he maintained that “every sin, then, consists in an act of will.”⁴⁹ Finney might well be regarded as just another heretic attached to our “Christian” heritage, and that assessment would not be wrong. Unfortunately, we can see his fingerprints all over modern Evangelicalism; he popularized many things including evangelistic crusades, revival meetings, altar calls, invitations, and even the moral reformation of our culture⁵⁰ (today commonly referred to as “saving our culture”). In addition to all of the cosmetic inheritances from Finney, his definition of sin has not



Charles Finney

been lost within our modern thinking either. Rick Warren states: “Although man has tremendous potential for good, he is marred by an attitude of disobedience toward what God called ‘sin.’”⁵¹ Regrettably, along with a flawed view of sin comes a skewed view of what is necessary for salvation, and it is this unbiblical view of salvation that forms a fundamental building block in the bridge to Ecumenism. The Scriptures paint a very different picture of who we are; the problem is much deeper than simply not projecting a positive attitude or succumbing to an *attitude of disobedience*. The Psalmist said, “Behold, I was shapen [brought forth] in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5)⁵² – with conception the sinful inheritance from Adam is attached to the new life that begins in innocence. Jesus declared that it was the heart that produced all sorts of evil; it was not simply the actions that were sinful, but the heart, the source of those actions, was the seat of sin (Mark 7:21-23). Paul further clarified this: “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned ... Therefore as by the **offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation**; even so by the righteousness of one *the free gift came upon [to] all men unto justification of life*” (Romans 5:12, 18). There was one offense that landed all of mankind in the

⁴⁵ <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/cho/general.htm>

⁴⁶ <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/exposes/graham/general.htm>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Charles Finney, *Systematic Theology*, Lecture II, <http://truthinheart.com/EarlyOberlinCD/CD/Finney>

⁴⁹ Ibid., Lecture XIV.

⁵⁰ <http://www.rapidnet.com/~jbeard/bdm/Psychology/revival.htm>

⁵¹ <http://www.saddleback.com/aboutsaddleback/whatwebelieve/index.html>

⁵² Strong’s Online.

pool of sin: we are born sinners – the corruption of sin is inherited from Adam (1 Corinthians 15:22). If it were only a matter of individual disobedience, then these verses would make little sense; however, through Adam we have inherited a sin nature, a heart of deceit that renders us all sinners before God. Herein is the reason that Jesus Christ, eternal God made flesh, remained sinless: He was conceived by the Holy Spirit, not by man (Luke 1:35). The Jews had this inherent sinfulness just as surely as the Gentiles did – Adam is the father of us all.

The Law of Moses was added to ensure that mankind understood their position before a holy God: “... the law was our schoolmaster *to bring us* unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith” (Galatians 3:24). The Law established, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that sin was a reality for all of mankind, and it presented, in a tangible way, the need for faith in order to come to God. “Without faith *it is* impossible to please” God (Hebrews 11:6); this held true for the Israelite coming to present his sacrifice upon the altar in Jerusalem as well as for the Gentile who stood afar off and watched. The Law of Moses did not change the way to God, it simply confirmed God’s holiness and man’s sinfulness, and foreshadowed how the Lord would one day redeem mankind. The way to God has always been by faith in the grace of God. What the Jews from Jerusalem could not get past was their traditional way of living. God is bigger than Judaism; long before Moses, God was there instructing those who sought after Him (Genesis 6:22; 18:19), but the Jews were having great difficulty grasping that truth.

These Jews from Jerusalem, including Peter, knew that there was no justification through the keeping of the Law. In simple terms, this is why they came to the Lord Jesus Christ by faith; they recognized that the Lord, through His death, burial and resurrection, had procured their justification. These Jews knew that God could never pronounce them righteous only through their adherence to the demands of the Law; therefore, they appropriated the cleansing that comes through Christ. The point that Paul is very carefully delineating is that these Jews, who were enmeshed in practicing the traditions of Moses, knew that it was only in Christ that they would appear as righteous before the eternally holy God. It would be by faith that they would be justified, not by works of the Law (not the Mosaic Law, nor God’s Law – the Ten Commandments).

“But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets [this phenomenal truth is what these Judaizers were missing]; Even the righteousness of God *which is* by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus: Whom God hath set forth *to be* a propitiation [an appeasement, a means of forgiveness] through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; To declare, *I say*, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus. Where *is* boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law. *Is he* the God of the Jews only? *is he* not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also: Seeing *it is* one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law” (Romans 3:21-31).⁵³

Something that we are prone to lose sight of, and what the Jews of Paul’s day failed to grasp, is that the Law of Moses and the prophets of old all anticipated the coming of Christ. The Psalmist David looked beyond the sacrificial system (Psalm 40:6-8); Isaiah spoke prolifically of the coming Messiah (Isaiah 53:1-9; 55:1-5). Moses declared: “The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a

⁵³ Friberg Lexicon.

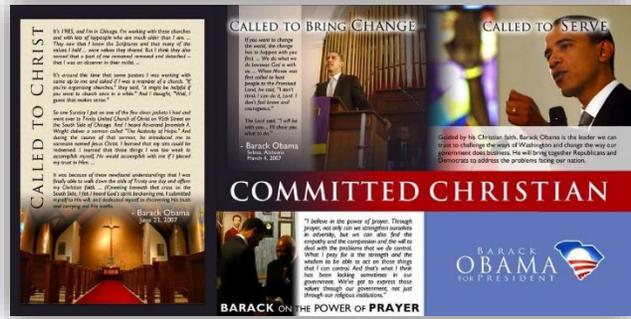
Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken ...” (Deuteronomy 18:15), and the Lord confirmed this (by repetition): “I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him” (Deuteronomy 18:18). Jesus came, the eternal Word made flesh (John 1:14), He spoke all that the Father commanded (John 8:28), and clarified that He had fulfilled the words of Moses and the prophets (Luke 24:44). Jeremiah spoke very specifically of a New Covenant being established with Israel (compare Deuteronomy 4:13-14 with Jeremiah 31:31), and Jesus instituted that very thing with His disciples (Luke 22:20; Hebrews 8:13; 9:1; 10:6-10), and Peter was there with Him when He did it. Peter experienced, firsthand, the Lord instituting the New Covenant, yet he clung to a form of the Old Covenant and tried desperately to bring the two together.

Paul goes on to state that the reason that the Jews believed in Jesus Christ was that they realized that there was no justification through the Law. They were persuaded that they could be justified before God, declared to be just and righteous through the works of Christ, not through the works of the Law. If we pause for a moment and give this our attention, we will be amazed that these Jews who sought to include the traditions of Moses in their new faith, understood that there was no justification before God through the Mosaic traditions – yet they clung to them and sought to impose them on the Gentiles as well. Knowing that there was no spiritual benefit realized from their traditions, they still endeavored to make them integral to their new life in Christ. Clearly, what they had failed to make time for was an examination of their own Scriptures, which would have made plain to them that the foreshadowing had been fulfilled in Christ (Colossians 2:17; Hebrews 10:1-2).

However, are we much different today? Evangelicals have adopted a casual attitude toward spiritual things. Much thanks for this goes to men like Billy Graham who have reduced what it means to be a disciple of Christ to going forward at a meeting (for those who are fortunate enough to add this to their résumé of spiritual activities), pray a simple prayer, and then return to an apostate denomination to live a wonderful “Christian” life. Jesus, on the other hand, identified what He expected from a disciple, and it was a tad more than Billy Graham’s expectations. Jesus declared: “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). We might understand that Jesus was not advocating that we become hateful toward those closest to us, but what He sought to emphasize is the love that we are to have for Him: our love and commitment to Him must be above that of close family ties, and even greater than our love for our self! Commandment Five tells us that we are to *honor* our parents (Exodus 20:12), and Paul likened a husband’s love for his wife to be like unto that of Christ for His *ekklesia* (Ephesians 5:25) – Jesus’ *hate* comes under Commandment One (make no other gods – Exodus 20:3), and how easily a spouse or one’s family can become a higher priority than the Lord. Jesus continued with an exhortation to count the cost of following Him first (Luke 14:28) because there is a price to be paid, and it is better to make the commitment with that understanding in mind (2 Peter 2:21). Paul confirms, “... all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:12). These words are a far cry from what we hear and see today.

It might be very popular to have a “Christianity” that does not interfere with one’s lifestyle (like President Obama being referred to as a committed Christian⁵⁴), but that is not what Jesus taught. Increasingly, today’s Evangelical is becoming convinced that he is spiritually prepared to meet God: they’ve had a spiritual experience and that is sufficient to carry them into heaven with ease. The position of the believing Jews of Jerusalem was such that they recognized that the Law could not justify them before a holy God, and so they came by faith to Christ. However, rather than looking closely at the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for all of mankind, they sought to drag their Jewish customs into their new faith in Christ. Today’s

Evangelical endeavors to hold his spiritual experience as a “fire insurance policy” while he continues on in his worldly ways; like the Jews of Peter’s day, he has embarked on an impossible journey that will end in the destruction of his faith. The Evangelicals need to realize that faith in Christ **must** be followed with a lifetime of faithfulness to Him, and Paul has made it perfectly clear that the Galatians were replacing the true Gospel with a false one – both groups are religious, but neither one holds the truth of the Gospel that leads to life eternal. You simply cannot grasp a part of the Truth, ignore the rest, and come away unscathed! The Galatians were setting in place their departure from God Who had called them into the grace of Christ. If we cling to a lie (or a half-truth), then we are party to the lie. The eternal destiny of liars has been spelled out for us: “... the fearful [cowardly⁵⁵], and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and **all liars**, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Revelation 21:8). “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief [*apistia* – *no faith; faithless*], in departing [withdrawing] from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12).⁵⁶



17. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, *is* therefore Christ the minister of sin? God forbid.

Paul now poses a very interesting question to those who are seeking to incorporate their Jewish traditions into their new faith in Christ. Keep in mind that these were Jews who recognized that their Mosaic traditions were insufficient for salvation. Paul builds a foundation for his question and it is this: while looking for the justification that comes through what Christ has done, we are at the same time still sinners. This is a very interesting premise to establish. It seems that what is showing its head here is the concept of sinless perfection. Did these Jews think that by claiming the cleansing of Christ by faith and holding tenaciously to the traditions of Moses that they would achieve sinless perfection in this life? Perhaps. Remember that the root of this Judaistic error comes

⁵⁴ <http://www.ndtv.com/article/world/obama-is-a-committed-christian-says-white-house-45964>

⁵⁵ Vine’s “fearful.”

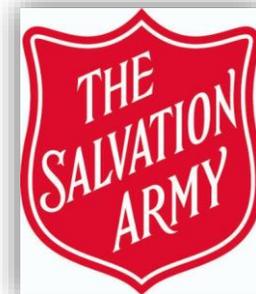
⁵⁶ Strong’s Online.

from those who came out of the sect of the Pharisees – those who saw themselves as the truly spiritually elite segment of the Jewish society. They have now added faith in Christ to their superior spirituality – what more could it mean than complete sanctification? Even though they accepted the fact that without Christ they could never be declared righteous, they still remained unwilling to release their self-appointed pre-eminence over the Gentiles. Even as they sought to be righteous in Christ by faith, they were still *sinner*s; this “indicates the ‘surprise of the Jew’ who learned for the first time that before God he had no moral superiority over the Gentiles whom he superciliously dubbed ‘sinners,’ while he esteemed himself to be ‘righteous.’”⁵⁷ What these Jews were discovering was that the ground at the foot of the cross of Christ was level; they were not a step above the heathen Gentiles. The attitude of the Pharisees is openly evident in the parable that Jesus told of the Pharisee and the publican entering the temple. The Pharisee’s prayer, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men,” amply illustrates their assessment of their own spiritual superiority (Luke 18:11) – it was this attitude that was being carried into their new faith in Christ.



John Wesley

The concept of sinless perfection, or complete sanctification, is not unheard of today. John and Charles Wesley held to a form of sinlessness for the truly born-again Christian, and this is still commonly held within the Methodist denomination, which is an outgrowth of the Wesleys’ ministry. What is known as the Holiness movement (to which the Wesleys were contributors) holds to a second experience after salvation (most commonly referred to as the baptism of the Holy Spirit) that will lead, either immediately or through time (depending on the denomination), to this sinless perfection. There are many groups today that have ties of varying degrees to the Holiness movement; the Pentecostals sprang out of this group, the Quakers, the Salvation Army and the Christian and Missionary Alliance all owe some of their heritage to this group. The revival fellowships and the Keswick conferences have also flowed out of the Holiness movement.

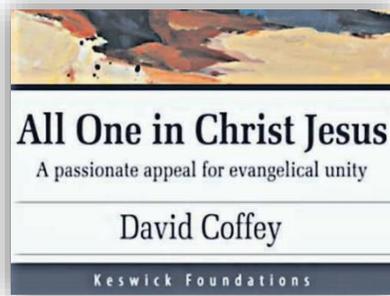


In the past, whenever I heard of Keswick conferences, I always envisioned that it would be the very spiritual who would attend such sanctimonious gatherings. However, the Keswick organization is one that promotes the contradiction of the “Lordship of Christ” and Evangelical unity under its banner, “All One in Christ Jesus.”⁵⁸ Even while they desperately cling to a highly spiritual aura of committed Christianity with one hand, they tenaciously maintain a firm grip on heresy with the other (not much different from the Jews who touted faith in Christ but would not relinquish their Jewish customs). It only takes a very brief look at the Canadian Revival Fellowship and the Keswick movement to realize that they are fraught with Ecumenism – their pursuit of unity has surpassed any concern that they may ever have had for the lordship of Jesus Christ. An objective view of the Holiness movement, as well as most of its offshoots, leads to the conclusion that the movement was destined for heresy from the very beginning, for it included in its record of

⁵⁷ Vine’s, “found.”

⁵⁸ http://www.keswickministries.org/who_we_are

founding principles the idea of “entire sanctification.”⁵⁹ You simply cannot begin a journey with one flat tire and expect it to mend itself and inflate as you go; you cannot begin with a serious flaw and expect to promote a spiritual work that is Biblically sound – it simply cannot be done. Undoubtedly there have been those who have been used of the Lord from within these movements, but that does not excuse anyone who truly desires to live Biblically from participating with them (Romans 16:17-18).



The question posed by Paul is an interesting one. If, while we look to be justified by faith in the sacrifice that Christ made for us, we are found to be sinners, does that

make Christ a minister of sin? *Minister* is from the Greek word *diakonos* (*dee-ak'-on-os*) from which we get our word *deacon* – one who executes the commands of another.⁶⁰ If, as it appears, these Jews thought that they had the upper hand on sinless perfection, or complete sanctification, and then were found to still be sinners, then one of two options was available to them: either they were not perfect as they thought or Christ was the servant of sin. In reality, what Paul has presented here is a no-win argument against what they were desperately trying to impose on the Gentiles. The only way that they could maintain a spiritually superior position (perfection like unto the sinless Son of God) would be to make Christ subject to the sin that they found in their lives. It would seem inconceivable that they would presume to be that arrogant. To help them out, the Spirit of God used the word *ara* (translated as *therefore*) which is a Greek particle “denoting an interrogation to which a negative answer is presumed”;⁶¹ in other words, this is a rhetorical question that requires a negative response. However, just in case they missed all of this, the verse ends with *me (may) ginomai* (*ghin'-om-ah-ee*) – literally, *let it not be!*⁶² These Jews are left with only one option: their high opinion of themselves has been proven faulty; before God, they are no different from the Gentiles. “... let God be true, but every man a liar ...” (Romans 3:4).

18. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

The thrust of Paul’s words here is this: if I rebuild those aspects of the Mosaic Law that I have declared to be destroyed, or removed, because they have been done away with in Christ, then I only establish myself as a lawbreaker. The word *transgressor* carries the thought of violating the Law; even though it carries a central thought similar to the Greek word for *sinner* (which is applicable to everyone), it is different to that extent (i.e., it identifies an active breaking of the Law). Paul has openly and fervently declared that the Mosaic Laws have been done away with, replaced by a New Covenant as foretold by the Jewish prophets (Jeremiah 31:31). His Message has been that there is neither Jew nor Gentile in Christ (Galatians 3:28), so for him to again set the Mosaic traditions in place would be to declare that he has been wrong and is a lawbreaker for having broken the Mosaic Laws.

⁵⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holiness_movement

⁶⁰ Strong’s Online.

⁶¹ Strong’s Dictionary.

⁶² Friberg Lexicon.

19. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

This is the believer's view of "a man is not justified by the works of the law" (Galatians 2:16). "Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ; that ye should be married to another [*you became someone different*], even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death" (Romans 7:4-5).⁶³ Notice that it is through the sacrificed body of Christ that we become dead to the Law of Moses, for in Christ the ordinances and traditions of Moses have been removed (Ephesians 2:14-16); Christ came in fulfillment of the Law (Matthew 5:17). The irony is that the Law ensured our death – "The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law" (1 Corinthians 15:56). Sin is the painful reminder of the death that lies ahead, and the Law became the power of sin in that it confirmed that no one is righteous, thereby substantiating the sentence of death. The Law ensured our death, yet, at the same time, it spoke of a coming day when the foreshadowed and promised redemption would be accomplished. Through faith in Christ, Who is the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world (1 Peter 1:18-21), we become dead to the Law – releasing us from its condemning grasp. The Law produces death, but now in Christ we are dead to the Law and alive unto God for the purpose of bearing fruit for Him (John 15:5; Ephesians 4:24). Christ came to forever fulfill and remove the Law of Moses, and through His death, burial and resurrection, the end of the Mosaic Law is realized. By faith in Christ, Who is the fulfillment of the Law, we are rendered dead to the reach and condemnation of the Law (it no longer has jurisdiction over us, for we are dead in Christ – Romans 6:3), and the righteousness of Christ (the Law of God finding voice through us) becomes ours through the inner working of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:1-4).

20. I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

The first phrase of this verse sets the foundation for what follows – *I am crucified with Christ*. We have just seen that, through the body of Christ, we are reckoned as being dead to the Law of Moses (Romans 7:4). Here we are told that if we are *in Christ*, then we are identified with Christ in His crucifixion – when He paid the price for sin upon the cross, we were there with Him.⁶⁴ The verb (*crucified*) is in the perfect tense (an action that has been completed in the past, does not need to be repeated, and has ongoing consequences), passive voice (our identification with Christ in His death is the work of God within us) and indicative mood (it is a statement of fact).⁶⁵ "For in that he [Christ] died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God. Likewise reckon ye also [*even so you must be considering*] yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto

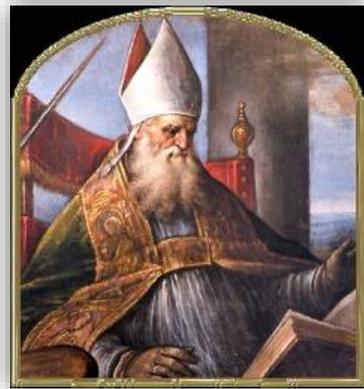
⁶³ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁶⁴ Strong's Online.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:10-11).⁶⁶ Through faith in Christ, we are accounted as being crucified with Him – one time only; inasmuch as Christ died only once, it follows that we can be identified with Him in His death only the one time.

This is significant, and underscores the reality of another passage of Scripture: “For *it is* impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put *him* to an open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6). We are exhorted: “Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing



Pope Gregory I

from the living God” (Hebrews 3:12). There are at least two very important principles here that we must not miss. The first is that Christ died once (and only once). We might think that that is obvious, but there is a vast, worldwide and very powerful group that does not acknowledge this reality – the Roman Catholic Church. Each time that they celebrate their Eucharist, they perpetuate the death of the Lord Jesus Christ in a twisted and corrupt manner. Through the magic of the priest’s incantations, the bread of the Eucharist becomes the very body of Christ, essentially identical in all aspects. Typically, the participants in the Eucharist only partake of the wafer; within the wisdom of the Catholic leadership, they have changed the two elements of the Lord’s Supper into one – the wafer. “If any one denieth, that Christ whole and entire - the fountain and author of all graces - is

received under the one species of bread; because that - as some falsely assert - He is not received, according to the institution of Christ himself, under both species; let him be anathema.”⁶⁷ The Council of Trent specifically identified those for condemnation who would deny that Christ, *whole and entire*, is contained within the wafer. In Catholic tradition, the “word *Mass* ... first established itself as the general designation for the **Eucharistic Sacrifice** in the West after the time of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604) ...” (emphasis added).⁶⁸ Notice that they openly identify their Eucharist as a *sacrifice* – a sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ with every mass that they celebrate; within their system, the Eucharist is an essential part of salvation. Whatever happened to the Lord’s words: “... this do in remembrance of me” (Luke 22:19)? It is very evident that the Catholic Church has added to the Word of God; “add thou not unto [God’s] words, lest he reprove thee, and thou be found a liar” (Proverbs 30:6).

The second thing that we must not miss from the passages quoted is the reality that salvation can be lost, and, should we turn away from the Lord, the forfeited salvation cannot be regained. The warning in Hebrews 3:12 is very real; we must guard against a *heart of unbelief* through which we would turn away from the Lord (become apostate!). Hebrews 6:6 clarifies for us why it is impossible to restore someone who has experienced new life in the Lord, and then has forsaken it and fallen away. When we are born anew in Christ through faith in His death, burial and resurrection, we are identified with Him in His once-for-all-time death on the cross. If we then, through a heart of unbelief (faithlessness) turn away from Christ, we have just turned our backs on

⁶⁶ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁶⁷ Council of Trent, Session XXI, Canon III, edited by J. Waterworth, 1848.

⁶⁸ <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/10006a.htm> , “Sacrifice of the Mass.”

the only way of salvation (Jesus said that He is the ONLY way to the Father! – John 14:6). To endeavor to return to Christ would be to attempt to sacrifice Him one more time upon Calvary, which is impossible according to Scripture. Salvation is through only one Way (Christ), and it is available only one time. This may run contrary to the teaching of many today, but the Scriptures, the Word of God, bear this out.

Man will always put options forward that do not bear the support of God’s Word. Calvinism declares the elect (those whom God has chosen for salvation) to be eternally saved – they cannot be lost even if they should desire to be so; they are eternally preserved. On the other extreme, we have men like Charles Finney who declared that salvation was lost every time that you sinned. Neither position is correct according to the Word of God; we must be on guard against such extremes.

Paul goes on: even though I was crucified with Christ, nonetheless I am living (present tense), and he quickly adds: “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.” Here is the mystery of the Christian life. Even though by faith I have reckoned myself to be crucified with Christ, yet I am alive; however, because I am crucified with Christ, it must be Christ Who lives out His life through me. Even though my crucifixion with Christ is a past action, I must continually apply that historical reality to my present living. “Likewise reckon [present tense] ye also yourselves [*even so you must be considering* (present tense; imperative mood, this is a command)] to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11).⁶⁹ As we are able, by the Spirit of God, to reckon, or account, ourselves to be dead to sin when temptation confronts us, to that extent we experience the reality of being crucified with Christ. We are told to “put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed [*being renewed*; present tense, passive voice (God must do the *renewing*)] in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Ephesians 4:22-25).⁷⁰ It is that present tense renewing by the Spirit of God that will instill the reality of being crucified with Christ into our daily living. It is not that we attain unto complete sanctification as Charles Finney and his Holiness crowd claim, but it is that we no longer live in a pattern of sin, and when we do sin, we confess it to God Who is “faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). John also wrote: “Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him” (1 John 3:6), and it is texts such as this that men like Finney would latch onto in an effort to support their complete-sanctification teachings. However, it is important to pay attention to the tenses of the verbs used in this verse in order to understand what is really being said. Despite the mockery that was made for referring to the Greek and Hebrew at the 2008 KJB Conference put on by the Sword of the Lord,⁷¹ we must recognize the limitations of our English language so that we can adequately glean some of the finer details from the original texts. Looking at 1 John 3:6, the word *abideth* and the second *sinneth* are both in the present tense and active voice – which simply means that the subject (*whosoever*) is presently doing these actions. So we have: “whosoever is abiding

⁶⁹ Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁷⁰ Strong’s Online.

⁷¹ <http://bibleversiondiscussionboard.yuku.com/topic/3925>; Norris Belcher, a board member of the Sword of the Lord, mocks those who refer to the original Greek and Hebrew texts in their study of Scripture. The position presented at the KJB Conference was that the KJB is the inspired Word of God and completely infallible. This elevates a less than perfect translation to the same level as (or higher than) the original texts – the English language is simply not able to express all of the nuances of either the Greek or Hebrew, despite the ranting of the men at this Conference.

in [Christ] does not sin: whosoever is sinning hath not seen Him” In the first case, we have the present, ongoing activity of abiding in Christ, and in the second case, we have a present, ongoing activity of sinning. We must balance this with 1 John 1:8 – “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,” and the admonition that follows to confess our sins. John is not writing about sinless perfection, but, rather, a life that is patterned after abiding in Christ (John 15:5) and an active confession of sins that are committed due to the weakness of the flesh. What this eliminates is a lifestyle of sin and compromise, and what it embraces is a life of abiding in the Vine (John 15:4-6) and producing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) to varying degrees (Matthew 13:8, 23).

Paul continues: *and the life which I now live in the flesh*, or “and what I am now living in the flesh.”⁷² Yes, the *now live* is a present tense verb and describes an ongoing activity. This ongoing activity of living in the flesh (Paul goes on to say) is being carried out (present tense *live*) by the *faith of the Son of God*. He draws the parallel here between living in the flesh and living by faith – both are verbs in the active voice. “By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice ..., by faith Enoch was translated ..., by faith Noah ... prepared an ark, by faith Abraham ... went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:4, 5, 7, 8). Abraham “believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness,” (Genesis 15:6) so “... that he might be the father of all them that believe ...” (Romans 4:11). We hear much among Evangelicals about *believing* and *believers*, but we see little evidence of godly living. Why is that? In the dumbing-down (Biblically) that has taken place within Evangelical circles, they no longer properly understand the Object of their belief. *Believe*, as it appears in the Greek text, is the word *pisteuo* (*pist-yoo'-o*) – a verb, an action word, and it means to place confidence in,⁷³ or to think to be true.⁷⁴ *Faith*, on the other hand, comes from the Greek word *pistis* (*pis'-tis*), a noun that means a “conviction of the truth of anything ... in the NT of a conviction or belief respecting man's relationship to God and divine things.”⁷⁵ These two words are very closely related and must not be separated; an understanding of both the action (*believe*) and the description of the action (*faith*) are necessary.



Among Evangelicals today, *believing on Jesus* receives the greatest emphasis: recognize that you have failures (the terms *sin* and *sinner* are frequently frowned upon as being unnecessarily harsh), believe on Jesus, receive Him into your life and you will be saved for all eternity. They have forgotten the parable of the soils that reminds us that the soil of our hearts must be prepared (Matthew 13). Are Evangelicals counseled to count the cost of following Jesus (Luke 14:25-33)? No! It is virtually unheard of today; to the Evangelical who is fed the message of “just believe,” counting the cost would be considered to be far too negative and needlessly demanding. The teaching today is this: pray a prayer, believe, and you are set for eternity – no qualifiers, no exhortations, no instruction (doctrine has been downplayed to the point that it is no longer of any

⁷² Stephanus 1550 NT.

⁷³ Strong's Online.

⁷⁴ Friberg Lexicon.

⁷⁵ Strong's Online.

importance – which fits well with the Ecumenical flavor of the day). It is standard practice to believe and live like before – fine, upstanding citizens of this world, unprepared to qualify for the Lord’s “well done” (Matthew 25:21), but equally unprepared to hear: “depart from me, ye that work iniquity” (Matthew 7:23). Evangelicals learned well from Billy Graham who would “convert” them and send them back to their former, often spiritually-dead churches. James tells us very clearly how far just believing will get you: “Thou believest [*pisteuo* (*pist-yoo’-o*)] that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe [*pisteuo*], and tremble” (James 2:19).⁷⁶ Today we read that Abraham *believed* the Lord and it was accounted unto him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6), and we latch onto that and ignore the context. Abraham *believed* in the Lord, acted upon what the Lord told him, and that (believing and acting) was counted to him as righteousness; by faith Abraham “went out, not knowing whither he went” (Hebrews 11:8). Abraham believed what the Lord told him, he considered the cost and went forth in obedience. Abraham had an active belief in the Lord but it was based on reality; it is essential that we understand the price of following the Lord before we say, “I believe.” The Word of God that fell on the rocky soil produced an immediate “I believe,” but when stress was added because of the Word, the faith evaporated and the *believing* disappeared (Matthew 13:20-21). Likewise, the weedy soil produced new life, but the cares of this world were permitted to choke the new life out (Matthew 13:22 with John 15:2).

Those within mainline denominations will be more likely to speak of faith – a noun that is supposed to represent what they actively believe; however, with time it has degenerated into the *Anglican* faith, or the *Presbyterian* faith, or perhaps some other formalized *statement of faith*. They own the word *faith*, they might even hold to the formality of their traditions but there is no longer any active belief in the words of their faith. One is as sad as the other. The Evangelical “believes in Jesus,” but has no understanding of Who He is or what he should believe; the mainline Protestant holds tenaciously to the tradition of his faith, but has lost all understanding of what that faith means. In both cases “they will not endure sound doctrine,” but have turned away from the truth of the Word of God and have “turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:3-4), which stand in contrast to the truth (Titus 1:14).

What Paul is advocating here is to live your faith like Abraham of old – He is “the father of all them that believe” (Romans 4:11). There is no room here for the modern believe-receive gospel, nor for faith in a tradition. This is an active belief in God and His living Word, demonstrated by living in obedience to His Word through the power of the Spirit. Paul declares that the life that he is now living is being lived in accordance with the living faith of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. This is not faith in a preacher. This is not faith in a denomination or a movement of long standing. It is not even faith in knowing that I prayed a prayer after the pattern that I was given. This is abiding in the Vine (John 15); this is the reality of walking after the Spirit (Romans 8:1, 4). This is a prepared soil that produces an abundance of the fruit of the Spirit despite the challenges (Matthew 13:8, 23 with Galatians 5:22-23), a heart that is thoroughly committed to enduring to the end (Hebrews 3:6).

We now come to the statement that makes it all possible: “the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.” “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son ...” (John 3:16). Here we see the perfect unity of purpose of both God the Father and God the Son. God the Father so loved that He gave the eternal Word to take on the form of sinful man, and the eternal Word, begotten in the form of sinful man, so loved that He gave Himself for my (our) sake.

⁷⁶ Strong’s Online.

However, we must not become high-minded and endeavor to create the false impression that we are of such incredible value to God that He simply had to redeem us – He couldn’t help Himself. “But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). The word *commendeth* literally means to put together, and here it tells us that God is *demonstrating* or *revealing* His love (it is in the present tense).⁷⁷ He is doing this “while we were yet sinners,” or *we still being sinful*.⁷⁸ “The LORD looked down from heaven upon the children of men, to see if there were any that did understand [to act wisely], *and* seek God. They are all gone aside, they are *all* together become filthy [morally corrupt]: *there is* none that doeth good, no, not one” (Psalm 14:2-3⁷⁹; along with Romans 3:10). Even while God was demonstrating His great love for us, we were still very much preoccupied with sin, which serves to confirm our destiny of eternal separation from God in hell.



James Dobson

This is not a popular theme today. It is far more in vogue to speak of building one’s self-esteem, and of learning to love yourself first so that you can better love others. Robert Schuller redefined sin to be “any act or thought that robs myself [sic] or another human being of his or her self-esteem.”⁸⁰ He redefined sin to be a failure to think highly enough of one’s self or of permitting someone else to hold a high estimation of himself. James Dobson is quoted as saying that if he could prescribe one thing for the women of this world, it would be “a healthy dose of self-esteem and personal worth (taken three times a day until the symptoms disappear). I have no doubt that this is their greatest need.”⁸¹ Wow! According to these two highly esteemed Evangelicals, the antidote for sin is a strong and “healthy” self-esteem. Despite this clear departure from the declarations of God’s Word that we are sinners who are doomed to

destruction without the Lord, here are two popular Evangelicals who promote the need for man to think “more highly than he ought to think” (Romans 12:3). We live in a world filled with self-hyphenated words: self-esteem, self-worth, self-love, self-acceptance, self-justification, and so the list goes, but you will never find *self-denial* among them, even though that’s what Jesus requires if we desire to be His disciple (Matthew 16:24). The beginning of man’s love-affair with self-esteem did not originate with the first purveyors of psychology, although psychologists will promote it for all that they’re worth; rather, with man, the “self-esteem movement began in the third chapter of Genesis.”⁸² After the sin of Adam, God came to the Garden to commune with him and Eve, but they fled from His presence. When God asked Adam if he had eaten of the forbidden tree, he invoked the first case of self-justification: “The woman whom thou gavest *to be* with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat” (Genesis 3:12). Moreover, Eve used the same technique, passing the blame to the serpent. However, what is evident from Genesis 3 is that self-justification does not work with God; we are still responsible for our actions. We need to go back one-step further to find the father of self-esteem: “How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! *how* art thou cut down to the ground, which didst weaken the nations! For thou hast said

⁷⁷ Strong’s Online; Friberg Lexicon.

⁷⁸ Stephanus 1550 NT.

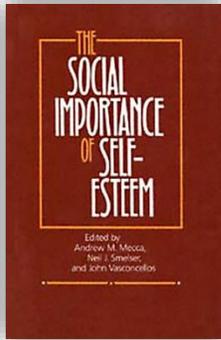
⁷⁹ Strong’s Online.

⁸⁰ Robert Schuller, *Self-Esteem, the New Revelation*, p. 14.

⁸¹ Martin and Deidre Bobgan, *James Dobson’s Gospel of Self-Esteem & Psychology*, p. 99.

⁸² <http://www.pamweb.org/selfestm.html>, “Self-Esteem for Christians?”

in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; **I will be like the most High**” (Isaiah 14:12-14). What should be obvious to all who read this, even if we fail to make the connection in our day, is that Satan did not suffer from low self-esteem, but rather from an inflated self-esteem called pride! Now why would someone like Dobson, who professes to be a Christian, promote something that was the devil’s downfall? Could it be that they have heeded the cunning whisper of Satan in his efforts to destroy mankind?



In the late 1980s, California embarked on a government-supported, three-year, \$735,000 study to discover the relationship between low self-esteem and social ills in six specific areas: 1) crime, violence and recidivism, 2) alcohol and drug abuse, 3) welfare dependency, 4) teenage pregnancy, 5) child and spousal abuse, and 6) children failing to learn in school.⁸³ The thinking that sold the governor on supporting this study with taxpayers’ dollars was the possibility of eventually balancing the state’s budget through the results of a more productive society (paying more taxes) and reduced criminal activity. The product of this study, carried out by a task force of twenty-five, was a book, *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*, in which the stated premise of the study is that “many, if not most, of the major problems plaguing society have roots in the low self-esteem of many of the people who make up

society.”⁸⁴ Despite the best efforts of those involved in this study, “the report contained little to support that assertion.”⁸⁵ “However, more recent studies indicate a definite relationship between violent behavior and **high** self-esteem” (emphasis in original).⁸⁶ Now why should the conclusions of this latter study not be surprising? The father of sin, the devil, has exhibited the highest possible self-esteem (to be like God), and has passed this along to those who are drawn into the “we-are-gods” philosophy of the New Age movement, which also finds its roots in the lie of Satan in the Garden of Eden. Paul declared to the Philippians: “*Let nothing be done* through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3); we are to consider others as being superior (literally, to hold over⁸⁷). Jesus said: “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets” (Matthew 22:37-40). The focus of our affections is to be, first of all, toward God and then, secondly, toward our fellow man; within today’s philosophy, the first order of business is for you to love yourself, something that does not even enter Jesus’ summary of God’s commandments. However, the Lord does say that “If any *man* will come after me, let him deny himself [lose sight of one’s self⁸⁸], and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matthew 16:24). It does not take an in-depth study of the Scriptures to conclude that

⁸³ <http://www.pamweb.org/selfestm.html>, “Self-Esteem for Christians?”

⁸⁴ Neil J. Smelser, “Self-Esteem and Social Problems: An Introduction,” *The Social Importance of Self-Esteem*, <http://www.escholarship.org/editions/view?docId=ft6c6006v5&chunk.id=d0e465&toc.depth=1&toc.id=d0e465&brand=ucpress>

⁸⁵ R.F. Baumeister, J.D. Campbell, J.I. Krueger, K.D. Vohs, “Exploding the Self-Esteem Myth,” *Scientific American*, November 2005, <http://www.sciam.com/article.cfm?id=exploding-the-self-esteem>

⁸⁶ <http://www.pamweb.org/selfestm.html>, “Self-Esteem for Christians?”

⁸⁷ Vine’s “better.”

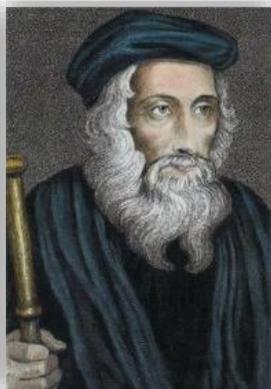
⁸⁸ Strong’s Online.

we are not called to bolster self-esteem, but rather to crush it (to esteem ourselves dead unto sin – Romans 6:11) and permit the Spirit of God to work in us so that we might walk in newness of life with Him (Romans 6:4).

The provision has been made for us to live according to the leading of the Spirit of God; Jesus, as the eternal Word, gave Himself (He was not murdered) for us. From the very first sacrifice made in the Garden of Eden to cover the sin of man, God has demonstrated His love and mercy for sinful mankind; however, when Jesus, eternally God in human flesh, gave Himself on the cross for the sins of the world, the **final sacrifice** was made. “If we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins ...” (Hebrews 10:26). Jesus died once and brought an end to the ordinances and sacrifices of the Mosaic covenant (Ephesians 2:14-16). This is the simple truth that the Galatian believers had been hoodwinked into questioning; this is the liberating truth that the believers in Jerusalem struggled to accept. There is no place for keeping the Mosaic traditions in the new life in Christ; this is why Paul called what the Galatians were being persuaded to accept a *different gospel* – it was not the Message that he had brought to them (Galatians 1:6-7).

21. I do not frustrate the grace of God: for if righteousness *come* by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

In this very brief recap of the position that Paul has just established, one that is secured by Christ living through the believer, he makes this initial declaration: “I do not set aside the grace of God.”⁸⁹ Grace is a benevolent bestowal despite our unworthiness – a benefit provided through the great mercy of God. The Catholics view each of their eight sacraments as a means of instilling



John Wycliffe

saving grace into the life of the participant. We recognize the error of this, but what seems to gnaw around the edges of Paul’s declaration is the possibility that the Jewish believers saw an element of saving grace in keeping the Mosaic traditions, or, at the very least, accused Paul of discounting the grace of God by declaring the Mosaic ordinances to be ended. As we have already noted, these were, for the most part, traditions established by God through Moses, and the Jews were not prepared to give them up easily. The Message that Paul was given, in plain terms, does not in any way undermine the grace that God has for us.

As a matter of fact, Paul contends that if our approval before God came by way of the Law of Moses, then Christ died for no purpose. He underscores and emphasizes one more time that if we could be reckoned righteous by means of the Law, then Christ did not have to die. The KJV renders the last phrase, “Christ is dead in vain,” which is another indication that the Bishop’s Bible was a resource recommended to the translators to be used in developing the new translation. It is clear, if we understand anything from Scripture, that Christ is not dead, but rather “is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Romans 8:34). John Wycliffe

⁸⁹ Friberg Lexicon.

(1395) translated this as, “thanne Crist diede with out cause,”⁹⁰ thereby easily demonstrating the truth in this matter. Likewise, Tyndale and Coverdale after him, and even the translators of the Geneva Bible captured the truth concerning Christ in this phrase: not that Christ is dead, but that He would have died for no purpose if we could gain righteousness before God through the keeping of the Law. However, as we have seen in Paul’s testimonial identity with Christ on the cross, the grace of God is very present in permitting us to live in the flesh through faith in the Son of God, Jesus. The Law ensured that we all died, but God’s grace is effective to bring life through faith in Jesus, Who redeemed us. “For by grace are ye [you are being] saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God ...” (Ephesians 2:8).⁹¹ What could demonstrate the marvelous grace of God more than that? God’s gift of salvation will be the ultimate expression of the grace that He has extended to sinful mankind!

⁹⁰ <http://www.studylight.org/desk/?l=en&query=Galatians+2§ion=0&translation=wyc&oq=Galatians%25202&new=1&nb=ga&ng=2&ncc=2>

⁹¹ Stephanus 1550 NT.