

# STUDY NOTES for GALATIANS TWO

## THE AUTHORITY of PAUL

### GALATIANS 2:1-21

**PLEASE do not read these comments until you have read the scripture for this lesson. Begin by letting the Holy Spirit teach you directly from His Word.**

#### Summary and Historical Background

Paul continues the defense of his apostolic authority and the validity of his message from chapter one against the charges of the Judaizers. These Jews had disrupted the believers in the Galatian churches by introducing the law of circumcision as a part of salvation. In this chapter Paul proves that he is a true apostle and his message of salvation without the works of the Law can be trusted.

#### A. Reception of Paul by the Apostles - 2:1-10

The Judaizers tried to show that Paul was a man with a faulty message. They said he did not agree with the Apostles in Jerusalem. Paul exposed their lie by showing how the leading Apostles received him and his message as genuine.

2:1 - "*Then*" - marks another stage in his personal testimony (cf. 1:18, 21).

*"Fourteen years after"* - this is usually considered a full fourteen years or close to it, but the starting point for these 14 years is divided among the scholars. Some say the fourteen years start from Paul's conversion; others say it starts from Paul's visit to Peter after he was in Arabia for three years. Those who believe the fourteen years should be counted from Paul's conversion say this visit to Jerusalem occurred when he and Barnabas brought famine relief to the believers in Jerusalem. Those who believe the fourteen years should be counted from Paul's private visit with Peter say this visit to Jerusalem occurred when the church at Antioch sent Paul and Barnabas to the well-known council meeting in Jerusalem (Acts 15). There are good arguments for both positions, but the former position seems to have the best reasons

"I went up . . . with Barnabas, and took Titus" – Barnabas had been sent by the church in Jerusalem to the new church in Antioch in Syria to strengthen the believers in the faith (Acts 11:19-24). When many people were added to the church, Barnabas sought for Saul (Paul) in Tarsus to help him in the work at Antioch (Acts 11:25-26). While they worked together in Antioch, the church prospered. Then the Holy Spirit told the church to release them from the work in Antioch to preach the Gospel in Cyprus and in southern Galatia where they established several churches (Acts 13-14). It seems that Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem with Titus shortly after their first missionary trip. Titus was a Gentile convert of Paul (Tit 1:4), but the Scriptures do not tell where he met Paul. He may have been converted during Paul's ministry in Tarsus. He became a very useful co-worker with Paul, dealing with difficult problems in the churches (2 Cor 7:6-14; Tit 1:5).

*"I went up again to Jerusalem"* - there are two views regarding this visit. Some identify it with Paul and Barnabas' visit to bring famine relief (Acts 11:27ff) and others with their visit to resolve the issue of circumcision for Gentiles (Acts 15:1ff). The first view seems best for some of the following reasons.

2:2 - "*By revelation*" - this could refer to the prophecy of Agabus (Acts 11:27, 28). There was no such revelation in Acts 15.

*"Communicated"* - this means that Paul presented the Gospel that he preached to others for their consideration. This happened at both meetings.

*"Privately"* - this shows that Paul had a private meeting with some church leaders in Jerusalem identified as James, Cephas and John in v. 9. The private nature of this meeting is in agreement with his visit to Jerusalem in Acts 11:30, but not the one in Acts 15, unless it refers to some special meeting apart from the public one.

*"Reputation"* - this is a veiled reference to the influential church leaders at Jerusalem (James, Peter and John). Paul uses the same word three other places in this chapter (2:6a, 6b, 9) where it is translated "seemed" (cf. comments on these verses).

*"In vain"* - Paul met with these church leaders, not for their approval but to aid their understanding, so they would be able to support his ministry and not oppose it. If they opposed it, his churches would be wrecked and his labors would be in vain.

2:3 - *"Neither was Titus . . . compelled to be circumcised"* - Titus was a Greek and had no ethnic relationship to Israel. Circumcision was the mark God chose to identify those male Israelites and Gentile proselytes with Israel's theocratic government. It had nothing to do with salvation. Abraham was saved many years before God commanded him to be circumcised (Rom 4:9-12). There were many Israelite men who were circumcised that were never saved. Christians were not circumcised in the flesh, but in the heart and baptism was the mark of their identification with Christ. Baptism was only for believers. However, baptism was not limited to men, but included women. It was not limited to Israelites, but included Gentiles. In Christ there is neither Jew nor Gentile (3:28). It is open to all people, with or without circumcision. Titus was a test case. Would the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem force him to be circumcised, or would they allow him to remain uncircumcised? They demonstrated that there was a difference between Jews and Gentiles regarding circumcision and ceremonial laws. Gentiles were free from the Law. It had nothing to do with salvation. Some people have considered Paul to be inconsistent in this area because he later had Timothy circumcised (Acts 16: 1-3), but it must be remembered that Timothy was part Jewish and for this reason Paul performed the rite.

2:4 - *"False brethren"* - this description could mean the Judaizers were brethren with a false message, or that they were unsaved Jewish brethren with a false profession. The latter position seems to be the case from only other use of this word in 2 Cor 11:26. These men were traitors to the Gospel and were opposed to Paul and his message of liberty from the Law.

*"Brought in"* - These false men were secretly brought into the meeting that Paul had with the Apostles. While the Apostles seemed to be neutral, the false brethren tried to convince Paul to let Titus be circumcised. Such an act would bring all Gentile believers into bondage under the Law.

2:5 - *"We gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour"* - Paul, Barnabas and Titus refused to yield to the strong demands of the Judaizers in the presence of the Apostles.

*"Truth of the Gospel"* - they stood for the true Gospel in contrast to the false gospel of the Judaizers. The true Gospel sets men free from the bondage of the Law (cf. Jn 8:32, 36).

2:6 - *"Who seemed to be somewhat"* - "seemed" can be translated "were reputed." This is the second use of this Greek word in reference to James, Peter and John (cf. 2:2).

*"Whatsoever they were"* - as far as Paul was concerned their reputable position was a thing of the past. All believers stand on level ground at the foot of the cross. Those being considered were James, the half-brother of Jesus, who grew up with Him, and Peter and John, the disciples of the Lord, whom He trained. The Judaizers placed these men on a higher plane of authority than that of Paul.

*"It makes no matter to me"* - Paul simply was not impressed by former relationships to the Lord. He was not disparaging the former relationships of these men, but that was not the standard for one's authority.

*"Who seemed"* - or, "who were reputed." Paul's uses this Greek word again for the Apostles.

*"In conference added nothing to me"* - when Paul sat in conference with the Apostles, they added nothing to his message, such as circumcision or keeping the Law.

2:7 - *"But contrariwise"* – the Apostles not only refrained from adding to Paul's message, but they took their side in the struggle between the Judaizers and Paul and Barnabas. This was a serious setback for the Judaizers.

*"The Gospel of the uncircumcision"* - that is, the Gospel for the Gentiles. The Apostles realized that Paul was given the responsibility to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles, though he preached to Jews in almost every city.

*"The Gospel of the circumcision"* – the Gospel for the Jews. The Apostles recognized that Peter was primarily responsible for giving the Gospel to the Jews. There were not two Gospels, that is, one for the Gentiles and another for the Jews; there is one Gospel that Paul brought to the Gentiles and Peter brought to the Jews.

2:8 - *"He that wrought effectually in Peter"* - the Holy Spirit had done a marvelous work in Peter to reach a multitude of Jews.

*"The same was mighty in me"* - the Holy Spirit had done a mighty work in Paul to reach a great host of Gentiles.

2:9 - *"Who seemed to be pillars"* - James, Peter and John "were reputed" to be the pillars of the church at Jerusalem. This is the fourth time that Paul used this Greek word in reference to the Apostles. Paul's repeated use of this word shows that a person's reputation meant nothing to him. The only thing that mattered to Paul was the Word of God.

*"Perceived"* - these pillars recognized Paul to be a fundamental servant of the Lord. He was fully accepted by them as a true apostle.

*"Gave . . . the right hands of fellowship"* - agreement was indicated by joining the right hands. To be sure there was no misunderstanding about the nature of the agreement that was made between them. Paul clearly states it was in the area of fellowship. Paul never agreed to be under the authority of the leaders in Jerusalem.

2:10 - *"Remember the poor"* - the only request these Jerusalem leaders made of Paul was to remember the poor, a reference to the poor saints at Jerusalem, which Paul was happy to do (Rom. 15:26; 1 Cor. 16:1-4). Thus, Paul showed that he was not subordinate to the leaders in Jerusalem, but he was cooperative with them and they with him. This single request relates to the visit that Paul made to Jerusalem when he brought relief to the saints suffering from the famine. Notice, James made four requests of Gentiles in Paul's later journey to Jerusalem (Acts 15:19-20).

## **B. Rebuke of Peter by Paul - 2:11-21**

The Judaizers had used Peter as a standard-bearer to promote their cause in Galatia, even though he was not aware of it. To counteract this misuse of Peter, Paul recalled a situation that happened at Antioch. This incident showed that Peter was the one who was inconsistent, and not Paul as the Judaizers had charged. Paul's rebuke of Peter on this occasion brings Paul's defense of himself to a climax. He proved that he was not inferior to any of the Apostles in Jerusalem, not even to Peter.

2:11 - *"When Peter was come to Antioch"* - it seems best to place this event sometime between the "famine visit" and the "council meeting," because Peter took a solid stand with Paul against the Judaizers at the council (Acts 15:7-11).

*"I withstood him"* - Paul opposed Peter. Peter was rebuked by Paul for his hypocrisy. His practice was not consistent with the Gospel of grace. Although Peter was not infallible in his practice, he was still a great leader. Paul and Peter worked out the problem and remained in good fellowship (Acts 15; 2 Pet. 3:15).

*"He was to be blamed"* - Peter was justly blamed and he knew it (middle voice).

2:12 - *"He did eat with Gentiles"* - Peter was eating (imperfect tense shows that it was a continuous practice, not a chance meal). This was some sort of a common meal.

*"When they were come"* - Judaizers had come to the church in Antioch. Possibly they were "men from Judea" mentioned in Acts 15:1. Since James denied that he had sent these men to promote among them the views of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 15:24), they must have come on their own initiative.

*"He withdrew and separated himself"* - when Peter saw the Judaizers, he began withdrawing from the Gentiles and separating himself from them. The imperfect tense in these verses shows this was a gradual process.

*"Fearing them"* - the motive for Peter's action was fear, not conviction (cf. Prov 29:25).

2:13 - *"Other Jews dissembled likewise with him"* - Jewish Christians followed Peter. He was teaching them by his example. Peter knew better than to treat Gentiles this way; his former experience with Cornelius taught him that he was not to treat Gentiles as inferior (Acts 11: 2ff).

*"Barnabas"* - even Barnabas was led astray by Peter's example

*"Dissimulation"* - it simply means, "hypocrisy." Peter had taught the Jews to be hypocrites by his hypocrisy.

2:14 - *"I said unto Peter before them all"* - Paul rebuked Peter publicly because Peter had sinned publicly and was causing a public conflict by his hypocrisy.

*"Why compel thou the Gentiles"* - Peter's example compelled the Gentile Christians to live as the Jewish Christians, if they wanted to be genuine, first-class believers.

2:15 - *"Sinners of the Gentiles"* - "sinners" was a synonym among the Jews for the Gentiles. They thought that Gentiles were unsaved sinners until they became proselytes to the Jewish religion.

2:16 - *"Justified"* - it means that God declares a sinner righteous; he is acquitted of all guilt and condemnation. God does not declare anyone to be righteous by the works of the Law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. "Justified" is used four times in 2:16, 17.

*"Even we have believed"* - Jews get saved by faith in Christ, not by the works of the Law. This is the same way that Gentiles get saved. This is contrary to what the Judaizers were teaching. They were saying that Gentiles get saved by the works of the Law and by faith in Jesus Christ. They were wrong! Salvation for Jews and for Gentiles is by faith in Jesus Christ and faith alone. Peter's action by joining the Jews made it appear he was adding works to faith for justification.

2:17 - *"We ourselves also are found sinners"* - the word, "sinners," is a synonym for "Gentiles" as in v. 15. In effect Paul is saying, "Jews who come to Christ for justification without the Law are acting like sinful Gentiles, that is, they do not trust the Law of Moses in any way to save them. Now, then, does their trust in Christ instead of the Law cause them to sin against God and make Christ the minister of sin? No, in no way is this true!"

2:18 - *"If I build again the things which I destroyed"* - Paul was using himself as an indirect example for Peter. Peter had destroyed the Law as a means for salvation, but by yielding to the pressure of the Judaizers, he was building up the Law once again. This was sin. Peter was denying believers the freedom from the Law that Christ promised to all believers. A Jewish Christian that returns to Law is sinning against Christ; he is adding works to his faith in Christ. He is saying Christ's work is not sufficient to save him.

2: 19 - *"Dead to the law"* - Christ paid all the demands of the Law when He died on the cross for sinners. When a sinner accepts Christ as his Savior, he has died with Christ and the demands of the Law have been satisfied. Peter's decision to eat with the Jews in order to keep the Law denied

that he was dead to the Law.

2:20 - "*I am crucified*" - this verb is in the perfect tense and past voice, which means the work has been done in past time, but the results continue: "I was crucified with Christ and still am." A Christian must reckon himself to be dead to the lust of the flesh so he can live for Christ (Gal 5:24; Rom 6:6-13)

*"Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me"* - this shows the radical change that is accomplished for the believer through regeneration. Christ died in the place of the sinner to make it possible for the believing sinner to be justified. Now Christ lives in the believer to make it possible for him to be sanctified. Both salvation and sanctification are received through faith in Christ.

2:21 - "*Frustrate*" - to set aside, annul, nullify God's grace. That is what Peter had done. He nullified God's grace. Christ's death is made meaningless if keeping the Law can produce righteousness. Then Christ's death is no more than a fine example. Paul's condemnation of works for righteousness, in part or in whole, applies to all religious systems.