

Two Missions: Part 3: Galatians

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Lesson 114

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Two Missions: Petrine and Pauline

- There was a *feud* between the two missions of early Christianity
 - (1) the Jerusalem Church, lead by Peter, James, and John, held that **Christians must be Jews and must obey the Law** as prescribed in the Jewish scriptures
 - (2) one led by Paul that held that **Christians need *not* become Jews and need *not* obey all the Law** as prescribed in the Jewish scriptures. In particular, Paul believed:
 - Gentile Christians should keep the Jewish *moral* laws
 - But Gentile Christians did *not* need to keep the Jewish *ceremonial* laws such as circumcision, honoring the Sabbath, and maintaining kosher dietary food laws
- Note: Some of the material in this lesson comes from St. Paul vs St. Peter: A Tale of Two Missions by Michael Goulder

Galatians 1

- Paul opens his letter to Galatians expressing astonishment that some of the Galatians are *turning to another gospel (Gal 1:6)*, and that there are people who are troubling them and wanting to *pervert the gospel*
- As we know from our study of Galatians 2, it is *Peter, James, and John* who Paul is referring to!
- Paul says let those who preach a different gospel be *accursed*
- He continues by claiming that his gospel came through revelation through Jesus Christ, and then goes on to talk about what he had been doing just prior to that, which was persecuting Christians
- The reference to the one who should be accursed for teaching a false gospel is distant from the explicit mention of Peter's name in 2:11, but a reading of Galatians as a whole indicates it is Peter and other Jewish Christian leaders that Paul refers to

Galatians 2:1-6

- Last lesson we examined Galatians 2:1-6:
 - “Then after 14 years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, taking Titus along with me. I went up by revelation; and I laid before them (but privately before those who were of repute) the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, lest somehow I should be running or had run in vain. But even Titus, who was with me, was not compelled to be circumcised though he was a Greek. But because of false brethren secretly brought in, who slipped in to spy out our freedom which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage – to them we did not yield submission even for a moment, that the truth of the gospel might be preserved for you. And from those who were reputed to be something... added nothing to me;”

Review of Galatians 2:1-6

- *Spies are sent from the Jerusalem church* to see if the people in Paul's church at Antioch are *violating Jewish laws, such as by eating non-kosher meat*
- Paul knows that the Jerusalem church wants all Christians to obey Jewish laws, and *he is afraid the imposition of such a requirement, especially circumcision, will scare away the Gentiles*
- Thus Paul feels that *his ministry may be overturned by the actions of the Jerusalem church if they have their way*
- Paul describes his visit to Jerusalem to confront Peter, James, and John who lead the Jerusalem church
- Paul laid out his gospel to the leaders of the Jerusalem church making the case that Gentiles need not be compelled to obey Jewish laws

Review of Galatians 2:1-6

- Apparently the Jerusalem church leaders tried to coerce Paul and his church followers to obey the Jewish Law
- Paul referred to obedience to the Jewish law as **bondage** and he refused to submit to the leaders of the Jerusalem church on this issue
- To Paul the *truth of the gospel* was at stake because the idea that one must become a Jew and obey Jewish laws to attain salvation *undermined his belief in salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus*
 - This explains Paul’s statements in Chapter 1 where he curses those who preach *another* gospel
- Paul put down Peter, James, and John by referring to them as *“reputed pillars” of the church who “add nothing”*
 - *Harsh words for the closest disciples Jesus had!*

The Two Mission's Feud

- Thus there is a real feud going on between Paul and PJ&J
- Some advantages and disadvantages of each side include:
 - Paul is highly educated, whereas the Jerusalem church is led by uneducated, illiterate men (some are fishermen)
 - Peter, James, and John knew Jesus personally, whereas Paul did not
 - This argument was continually used against Paul, who *repeatedly defended himself by claiming to be just as much of an apostle as anyone else*
 - Presumably Peter, James, and John started with the followers of Jesus, and certainly they have many more followers than Paul does initially; but by appealing to Gentiles, Paul has a much wider audience he can eventually convert

The Two Missions

- Another advantage Paul had was that Gentiles had no obstacles to believing that Jesus was the Son of God, whereas *to many, many Jews, the idea that a crucified criminal could be the messiah was preposterous*
 - Jesus was very different from Jewish expectations of what a messiah would be like
- Paul writes letters to the churches he founded, but Peter, James, and John apparently never did anything like that
 - No one was disrupting their churches!
- Paul's letters gained wider circulation than the one church each letter was written to, and eventually these letters, called epistles, became a major part of our NT

Galatians 2:7-21

- Read Galatians 2:7-10
- Verse 8: “*for he who worked through Peter* for the mission to the circumcised *worked through me also* for the Gentiles”
 - Paul claims to be *entrusted* with the gospel to the Gentiles every bit as much as Peter leads the gospel to Jews – by using this clever argument, Paul gracefully concedes to Peter what is clearly Peter’s, yet simultaneously shares equal honors
- Read Galatians 2:11-21, about the Antioch church
 - Peter tends to vacillate in the feud depending on who he is with; when separated from the Jerusalem church hardliners, he is more agreeable with Paul; but runs back to the Jerusalem church positions when surrounded by its members
 - Doesn’t this sound like the Peter of the gospels, the Peter who wants to do so much but cannot seem to stick to it?

Galatians 2:11-21

- Galatians 2:12
 - When he came to Antioch by himself, Peter relaxed his obedience to Jewish law and ate with Gentiles, but then drew back when men from the Jerusalem church appeared
 - It seems to me that Paul is trying to bolster his Gentile followers into standing up to the Jewish Christians by referring to them as “the circumcision party”
 - Notice that Paul constantly reminds his readers (Gentiles) of circumcision, yet the basis of Paul’s argument against the Jerusalem church is not circumcision, but *the truth of the gospel*
 - This is a sincere argument since Paul really does believe that salvation comes through the death of Jesus and not through obeying the law

Galatians 2:11-21

- Galatians 2:12
 - Paul then confronts Peter, accusing him of hypocrisy, and accusing him of not being straightforward about the truth of the gospel
 - Here I assume “gospel” refers to the message Jesus preached, and not to any written text, as there was no canon yet (and hardly any texts written yet either)
 - Paul then expounds upon salvation through crucifixion and resurrection, culminating by saying that to try to achieve salvation through obeying the law is tantamount to making Jesus die for no purpose
 - Paul returns to this point in Galatians 3:10-11; 3:23-24
 - Gal 4:10 “observe days, months, seasons, years” refers to following laws related to the Jewish calendar (Sabbath, etc)

Paul addresses the Central Question

- Paul has some Jews in his churches, such as Barnabas who, when the Jerusalem church hardliners showed up, slide back to following Jewish laws, much to Paul's dismay (Gal 2:13)
- Paul constantly bolsters his Jewish Christian followers to avoid the temptation to follow the Jewish law, such as in Gal 4:21: “you who desire to be under the law...”
 - Some Jews were afraid of not obeying the law; Paul is trying to convince them that as long as they believe in Jesus they need not fear not following the law
- Gal 5:1: “Freedom in Christ has set us free...” is a reference to the **bondage** idea mentioned in Chapter 2
 - Question: Had you merely opened your Bible to Galatians Chapter 5 and started reading about freedom in Christ, how would you have interpreted freedom?

Galatians 3

- All of Chapter 3 is about the futility of following the law
 - In 3:6, Paul argues that people have salvation through faith
 - He cites Abraham as an example by making a point that Abraham (in a strictly literal reading of Genesis) “believed in God and it was reckoned as righteousness” and that men of faith are offspring of Abraham
 - Gal 3:10 talks about works of the law
 - The paragraph starting in Gal 3:15 is again about the law as shown in verse 17
 - Gal 3:19 says the law was temporary
 - Gal 3:21 says the law is not against God
 - Gal 3:23 argues the law was temporary until Jesus came
- Paul broke away from the law, but not from his obsession with the Jewish scriptures
- “following the law“ is *turning to another gospel*

Galatians 4 and 5

- Paul argues that through Jesus, we are not slaves to sin
- While wandering around somewhat in Galatians 4, Paul stays within reach of his argument that salvation comes through faith and not through obeying the law (e.g. 4:21)
- Paul again brings up the idea that obeying the law is bondage (this time referred to as a yoke, which is the same idea) in 5:1
- The passage starting in 5:2 is an elaboration of the idea stated earlier that to think one can achieve salvation through the law is to subvert the teachings of Jesus
- At the end of the paragraph from 5:2 to 5:12, Paul shows he still has in mind the Jerusalem church leaders who are trying to coerce the Gentiles into obeying the Jewish laws as he refers to those who “unsettle you”

Paul addresses the Central Question

- The animosity Paul feels by this feud is exemplified in Gal 5:12: "I wish those (the Jerusalem church!) who unsettle you (tell you to obey Jewish laws) would *mutilate themselves*"
 - Mutilation is a reference to circumcision
 - If you do not know who Paul is talking about, this may not seem to bad, but Paul is talking about Peter, James, and John, three of Jesus' closest disciples!
- Verse 13 refers to freedom in Christ (i.e. freedom from the law), which again shows that Paul has not strayed far from the idea of bondage he was concerned with earlier
- Finally in 5:14-6:10 Paul seems to get away from his feud with the Jerusalem church
- But in 6:11, he again seems to be pre-occupied with the effort of the Jerusalem church for obedience to Jewish law

Paul addresses the Central Question

- In summary, it seems to me that the *majority of the book of Galatians is concerned with Paul's confrontation with the Jerusalem church, in which Paul lost his Antioch church*
- Though explicit mention of the feud is limited to Ch. 2, there are references to it throughout the other five chapters
- Much of what he discusses in chapters 3, 4, and 5 address the issue of salvation through faith instead of obeying the law, which is exactly what his feud with the Jerusalem church is all about
- Paul's harsh words for Peter, James, and John range from *pervert* and *accursed* in Gal 1, to *spies, bondage, and condemned* in Gal 2, to *slavery* and *mutilate* in Gal 5, to a reminder that they are the party of *circumcision* in 6:11
 - Very harsh words indeed for the closest disciples of Jesus

Paul's feud

- A casual reading of Galatians may allow one to think that the feud was short, not too bad, and resolved by the idea of Paul preaching to the Gentiles and PJ&J preaching to the Jewish Christians
- However, Goulder's point is that the feud was not resolved, it was very bitter, and it lasted a very long time
- This feud involved a number of specific differences in addition to the central issues of Gentile's needing to obey the Jewish ceremonial laws and salvation through the law versus salvation through the crucifixion/resurrection of Jesus
- We will examine some of these specific differences in the coming lessons