

4. Understanding the Gospel of Grace – Part 3

In our last lesson, we saw that the Lord gave Paul almost all of his training for ministry in areas that were primarily Gentile with only some Jews in those areas. As a result, Paul learned to explain the Gospel without adding anything from the Jewish culture that would have brought confusion to the Gentile Christians. However, that did not mean that some Jews did not come and try to deceive the Gentile Christians and bring them under the bondage of the Jewish law. As a result, today we will see that the Jewish leaders of the church in Jerusalem made it clear that they did not expect the Gentile Christians to also adopt the Jewish law. We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn how to clearly explain the Gospel of grace so that they can develop an effective ministry of evangelism to non-Christians and effective ministry to new and immature Christians.

Galatians 2:1-2 says, “Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me. And I went up by revelation, and communicated to them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to those who were of reputation, lest by any means I might run, or had run, in vain.” Here, we see that Paul made his second visit to Jerusalem fourteen years after he became a Christian. He and Barnabas went together to share with the leaders of the church in Jerusalem the Gospel of grace that they had been teaching to the Gentiles. In addition, they also took with them Titus who was a Gentile.

Paul said that they had gone up to Jerusalem by revelation. That revelation is explained in Acts 11:27-30 where we read, “And in these days prophets came from Jerusalem to Antioch. Then one of them, named Agabus, stood up and showed by the Spirit that there was going to be a great famine throughout all the world, which also happened in the days of Claudius Caesar. Then the disciples, each according to his ability, determined to send relief to the brethren dwelling in Judea. This they also did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.” Here, we see that the Holy Spirit had revealed through Agabus the fact that there would be a famine. The Christians at Antioch understood the Gospel of grace and immediately saw this as an opportunity to minister to the Christians in Jerusalem which they did.

Paul also saw this as an opportunity to explain the Gospel of grace that he had been preaching to the Gentiles. He explained this privately to the leaders of the church at Jerusalem. Paul and Barnabas gave the leaders of the church at Jerusalem the opportunity to discuss any questions with them that they might have about the message that Paul and Barnabas were preaching. Paul had recognized and understood the difference between Jewish culture and Christianity for many years. At the same time, he recognized that the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem were all zealous for the Jewish law.

We see that the leaders of the church at Jerusalem showed their response by their actions. Galatians 2:3 says, “Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised.” Here, we see that Titus had accompanied Paul and Barnabas as they went to Jerusalem. Titus was a Gentile and had never been circumcised. The leaders of the church at Jerusalem showed that they agreed with the teaching of the Gospel of grace that Paul and Barnabas taught because they did not require Titus to be circumcised.

In contrast, at a later time, Paul chose to circumcise Timothy because he was half Jewish. Acts 16:1-3 says, “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was Greek. He was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted to have him go on with him. And he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in that region, for they all knew that his father was Greek.” Paul recognized the Jewish background of Timothy and knew that he would not be effective in sharing the Gospel of grace with the Jews unless he was circumcised.

Paul explains why he did what he did in 1 Corinthians 9:20-22 where we read, “And to the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might win Jews; to those who are under the law, as under the law, that I might win those who are under the law; to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law; to the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.” Here, we see that Paul wanted all people to really understand the Gospel of grace. He helped the Jews to realize that it was still all right to follow the instructions given to Abraham and circumcise their sons because that was required for all who were Jews long before the law was even given. Just as the Jews were not to require the Gentiles to be circumcised, the Gentiles were not to condemn the Jews for being circumcised. We want to help our children understand that both are right under Christian liberty.

Galatians 2:4-5 says, “And this occurred because of false brethren secretly brought in (who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” Jews, who claimed to be followers of Christ, were trying to make the Gentile Christians come under the Jewish law. Here, Paul described these Jews as false brethren. By trying to require the rules for a person to be Jewish to become a part of the requirements for Christianity, these false brethren were trying to change the Gospel of grace into a false gospel of works.

We see that these false brethren had come in to spy out the liberty that we have in Christ. It was their goal to bring Paul and all of the Gentiles back into bondage. The word “spy” spoke of a person that was a traitor and was working to deliver people to the enemy so that they could be destroyed. Here, we see that false teachers are actually the spies of Satan who are working to deliver new and immature Christians from freedom and back into the bondage of Satan.

Perhaps it may be hard for some people to understand the importance of helping our physical and spiritual children understand why it is important to recognize how to apply the Gospel of grace both to the Gentiles and also to the Jews. In the verses that we quoted earlier from 1 Corinthians 9, we see Paul made it clear that he was willing to help both Jews and Gentiles understand the meaning of true Christian liberty. Today, more than half of all people who are alive, live in cities. Many of these cities include people from many different ethnic groups. Many of these cities also have both Jews and Gentiles. If our children are going to be effective in explaining the Gospel of

grace in these cities, they must understand clearly what Christian liberty really means.

Galatians 5:13 says, “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” Here, we see that the true purpose of Christian liberty is to set us free to serve one another through love. The reason why many cults are so successful in the cities is due to the fact that there are few true Christians who are living in the cities so that they can serve one another through love. The lack of concern by Christians for people in the cities often means that few people in the cities are hearing the true Gospel of grace.

As a result, the cults offer a false love that is not love at all. Instead, the real goal of Satan is to keep non-Christians from hearing the true Gospel and to bring immature Christians back into bondage. Galatians 5:1 says, “Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage.” When we help our children to understand the true Gospel, we protect them from false teachers. We also equip our children to help set other Christians free from the yoke of bondage that Satan seeks to use to keep weak and immature Christians in bondage to fear so that they cannot serve others in love.

Paul said in Galatians 2:5, “To whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.” Paul did not submit himself to any false brethren for even an hour because he realized that they did not teach the Gospel of grace. In the same way, we are to set an example for our children by showing them how to set others free from the bondage of human rules. Human rules will never help a Christian to become more godly. Instead, human rules will hinder the growth of a Christian to maturity because such rules nearly always deal with outward actions or appearances and never touch the heart. In 1 Samuel 16:7, God said to Samuel, “But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.’” It is in the heart that we make the decision to serve others in love.

We should have the same purpose as Paul. That is to see the truth of the gospel continue to the next generation through our physical and spiritual children. This will happen best as they see how we help others learn to live in the liberty that Christ has provided for us. As they see our example, our physical and spiritual children will become mature “adult sons and daughters” and partners with us in the ministry of helping other Christians learn to walk in the liberty that Christ provided us when He set us free from our sin. That is one of the keys to help our children learn to live lives that will have an eternal impact. May the Lord richly bless you as you show your children how to help other Christians walk in liberty by serving others in love.