

5. Understanding the Gospel of Grace – Part 4

In our last topic, we saw that 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. In our topic today, we will see that the leaders of the church at Jerusalem recognized that Paul and Barnabas had developed just such a ministry to the Gentiles because they were able to clearly define the Gospel of grace so that they had an effective message to both Jews and Gentiles. We also want to help our children develop an effective ministry.

In our last topic, we saw that Paul and Barnabas shared with the apostles in Jerusalem the message that they had shared among the Gentiles. The reason for their desire to share with the other apostles was to confirm to all Christians that they were preaching the same message of the Gospel of grace. This was not because they needed approval but rather to help others understand that God had appointed them to take the Gospel to the Gentiles just as the other apostles were appointed by God to take the Gospel to the Jews.

In fact, Galatians 2:6 says, “But from those who seemed to be something--whatever they were, it makes no difference to me; God shows personal favoritism to no man--for those who seemed to be something added nothing to me.” Some of the Christians felt that the original apostles were greater in the sight of God. Paul said that was not true because God does not show personal favoritism to any person. Paul had been called by God to be the apostle to the Gentiles but that did not make him either greater or less than the other apostles. In fact, Paul said in 2 Corinthians 12:11-12, “I have become a fool in boasting; you have compelled me. For I ought to have been commended by you; for in nothing was I behind the most eminent apostles, though I am nothing. Truly the signs of an apostle were accomplished among you with all perseverance, in signs and wonders and mighty deeds.” Paul said that they were all given the signs of an apostle but that did not make any of them greater than other Christians. Instead, it meant that they had been given a particular ministry by the Lord.

It is important to help our children and all Christians understand that no ministry makes a person greater than any other person. We are all called to be bondservants of Christ. As bondservants, we are all partners and laborers together even though the Lord has given each of us different ministries. Just after telling the Christians in Corinth that they were carnal, Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3:6-9, “I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase. So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase. Now he who plants and he who waters are one, and each one will receive his own reward according to his own labor. For we are God's fellow workers; you are God's field, you are God's building.” We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn that the Lord has called and equipped each of them for a specific ministry and that we are all partners in ministry.

Paul illustrated the fact that God calls us to different ministries by what he said in Galatians 2:7-8 where we read, “But on the contrary, when they saw that the gospel for the uncircumcised had been committed to me, as the gospel for the circumcised was to Peter (for He who worked

effectively in Peter for the apostleship to the circumcised also worked effectively in me toward the Gentiles).” Here, we see that God had called Paul to be an apostle to the Gentiles and He had called Peter to be an apostle to the Jews. However, the key is that God was working in both of them to help them be effective in the ministry to which the Lord had called them.

We also see that the other apostles also all recognized that Paul had been called to take the Gospel to the uncircumcised (another word for the Gentiles). Here, we see another important lesson that we want to help our children understand. God may give them a ministry to a specific group of people. When the Lord does that, He may also give a special background to that person to prepare that person to work effectively with that specific group of people. This is why Romans 8:28-29 says, “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.” The first reason why God allows what happens in our lives is to conform us to the image of Christ. The second reason why God allows those things to happen is to equip us for the specific ministry that the Lord has for us.

We also see that God had worked effectively in both the life of Paul and the life of Peter. The word that is translated “effectively” is the word from which we get our word “energy”. Here, we see that God uses His power or energy to equip each Christian for the work to which the Lord has called that person. This same word is used in Ephesians 3:20-21 where we read. “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.” In these verses, we see that it is His power that works in us. We want to help our children understand that as they yield their lives to the Lord and allow His power to work in them, He will use them to do more than they could ever think or even imagine through their lives.

We also see the response of the other apostles as they heard how Paul and Barnabas had shared the Gospel of grace with the Gentiles. In Galatians 2:9-10, we read, “And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” James, Peter and John were recognized as three of the key leaders in the church at Jerusalem. James was the half-brother of Christ, who had become the recognized leader of the church at Jerusalem, by the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 . Peter and John were the two key apostles in the development of the church in Jerusalem.

These verses tell us that these were the three key men that recognized the grace that had been given to Paul. They recognized that it was the grace of God that had equipped Paul for the ministry of taking the Gospel to the Gentiles. Since these three men all had a key part in the development of the church in Jerusalem, they recognized that the Lord had been using Paul and Barnabas in the same way to develop the church among the Gentiles. The three recognized that Paul and Barnabas had preached the same Gospel of grace to the Gentiles that they had preached in Jerusalem. They realized that Paul and Barnabas had developed disciples among the Gentiles just as they had

developed disciples among the Jews.

As a result, these three men took the leadership in extending the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. This was a key action on the part of James, Peter and John. The extending of the right hand of fellowship was the way that people in that area made a vow of friendship. It also represented the fact that those who received the right hand were partners. In Acts 4:36, the apostles had changed the name of Joses the Levite to Barnabas. That verse says, “And Joses, who was also named Barnabas by the apostles (which is translated Son of Encouragement), a Levite of the country of Cyprus.” In this verse in Acts, we see that Barnabas was recognized very early by the leaders of the church in Jerusalem as one who gave great encouragement to others. Now they were recognizing that he and Paul were full partners in the ministry of the Gospel of grace.

The apostles also recognized the particular call in ministry that the Lord had given to Paul and Barnabas. They recognized that the Lord had called Paul and Barnabas to the Gentiles. This call was also recognized by the leaders of the church at Antioch. Shortly after Paul and Barnabas returned from their visit to Jerusalem, Acts 13:1-3 says, “Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away.” It was at this point that Paul and Barnabas began to expand their ministry to Gentiles in other regions.

Galatians 2:10 says, “They desired only that we should remember the poor, the very thing which I also was eager to do.” Here, we see one other area of ministry where the apostles encouraged Paul and Barnabas as they expanded their ministry to the Gentiles. This is also an area that we want to encourage in the development of our physical and spiritual children as they develop their ministry. Christ said in John 12:8, “For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always.” We need to help our children develop a great concern to share the Gospel with the poor.

As one of the pillars of the early church, James later wrote in James 2:5-7, “Listen, my beloved brethren: Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him? But you have dishonored the poor man. Do not the rich oppress you and drag you into the courts? Do they not blaspheme that noble name by which you are called?” James made it very clear that God has a great concern for the poor. In the same way, we should also have this same great concern as we help our physical and spiritual children in their spiritual growth. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children develop their ministry both in their own culture and in other cultures as the Lord leads them.