



### Time to Reflect

- What kind of opposition and frustrations exist today that hinder the spread of the gospel message?
- In what ways do some people seek to '...tamper with the gospel' in the world today? How can such deviations from the truth be avoided?

Last week we reflected on the power of the gospel and the transformation that it brings to the lives of those who hear and respond to God's incredible grace. We discussed the power of the gospel and narrowed in on Paul's transformative experience. This week we discover the extent to which Paul sought to defend his spiritual liberty in Christ at the Jerusalem Council.

**"We should read this passage with great fear and gratitude. It takes us to a meeting in Jerusalem which may seem distant from the concerns of 21<sup>st</sup> century Christians. But in fact, the stakes could not have been higher – it was a meeting which had huge consequences for us all, even today. And, as we'll see, God protected all of us – you and me – on that day."**

(Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You*, p37)

### Specifics

- Fourteen years had passed since Paul's first visit to Jerusalem (v1). As our passage begins, we see him return to this city and he took Barnabas and Titus with him.
- Barnabas was one of Paul's closest friends and they travelled together on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 13:1 – 14:38). Titus was a Gentile believer who worked with Paul and came to faith through Paul's ministry (Titus 1:4).
- What we encounter in this passage is a record of what is referred to as the Jerusalem Council. For more details on this gathering we should also read Acts 15.
- This was a significant event. Warren Wiersbe reflects, **"Paul's first fight for Christian liberty was at the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15:1-35; Gal. 2:1-10)...Had Paul been unwilling to wage this spiritual warfare, the church in the first century might have become only a Jewish sect, preaching a mixture of law and grace. But because of Paul's courage, the gospel was kept free from legalism, and it was carried to the Gentiles with great blessing.<sup>1</sup>"**
- It is important to realise that Paul undertook this trip **"...in response to a revelation..."** from God (v2). This reminds us that he was an apostle who followed the call and leading of God.
- Paul also went to Jerusalem because he wanted to reaffirm and reinforce the primary nature of his calling. He said, **"I wanted to be sure I was not running and had not been running my race in vain"** (v2).
- Paul was travelling with a very specific aim and purpose. Timothy Keller suggests, **"False teachers were telling these young Christians (the Galatians) that Paul was preaching a gospel that was inadequate and**

<sup>1</sup> Warren Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* (David C Cook, 2009), p43.

not as full as the original apostolic gospel preached by the Jerusalem leaders. They insisted that Paul taught an 'easy believism' that was his own very eccentric message.<sup>2</sup>"

- Paul wanted to counteract these claims once and for all. In doing so, he sought to move beyond opposition and frustration to fruitfulness – and all for the sake of the Galatians.
- The nature of the opposition that Paul and the Galatians experienced is referenced in (v4). Undoubtedly these were some of the Judaizers who had followed Paul and opposed his ministry.
- Note how they are referred to as "...false believers..." Wiersbe focuses on the danger that this posed when he points out, "The fact that Paul called them 'false brethren' indicates that they were not true Christians, but were only masquerading as such so they could capture the conference for themselves."<sup>3</sup>
- This is a reminder for Christians to be vigilant and perceptive. We must guard against the infiltration and impact of spiritual wolves. This is exactly what Paul sought to do.
- He stood firm, convinced by the gospel message and its power to transform lives. This resoluteness is clearly articulated in (v5).
- In general terms, a prevailing theme in this passage is that of gospel unity. Had the Jerusalem apostles sided with those who opposed Paul, this would have split the church in two.
- Christian unity is important and it needs to be grounded in gospel truth. Wiersbe develops this thinking as he contends, "Paul's concern was 'the truth of the gospel' (Gal. 2:5, 14) not the 'peace of the church'...'Peace at any price' was not Paul's philosophy of ministry, nor should it be ours...It is a serious thing to tamper with the gospel."<sup>4</sup>
- The remaining verses in our passage (v6-10) could be referred to as the personal confirmation. The Jerusalem leaders approved Paul's message and opposed his enemies (v7). Furthermore, they publicly recognised that God had called Paul to minister to the Gentiles.
- Wiersbe offers a concise summary of the conclusions reached at the Jerusalem Council as he writes, "There was agreement and unity: one gospel would be preached to the Jews and to Gentiles."<sup>5</sup>
- It was recognised that different people can be called by God to serve Him for different purposes and in different ways (v8). Yet all are called to proclaim, by word and deed, the same gospel. This is what it means to dwell in unity and see Kingdom growth.
- As our passage draws to a close, we move to consider practical issues – helping the poor (v10). Having discussed issues of doctrine and theology, Paul rightly lands this part of Galatians by reminding us of the need to live out our faith in meaningful ways.
- The Judaizers had been directly opposed but they persisted in interfering with Paul's mission and ministry. This required Paul to stand firm as he communicated the good news of the gospel with faithfulness and resilience.
- Paul was passionate about defending the truth of the gospel, even when he had to stand alone and face unpopularity.

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<sup>2</sup> Timothy Keller, *Galatians For You* (The Good Book Company, 2013), p38.

<sup>3</sup> Wiersbe, *Be Free: Galatians* p45.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, pp48-49.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p49.