

A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS

(LESSON TWENTY)

“CONTENDING FOR THE GOSPEL” (PART 6)

GALATIANS 2:6-10

(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)

6 But from those who were influential (whatever they were makes no difference to me; God shows no favoritism between people)—those influential leaders added nothing to my message.

7 On the contrary, when they saw that I was entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised just as Peter was entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised

8 (for he who empowered Peter for his apostleship to the circumcised also empowered me for my apostleship to the Gentiles)

9 and when James, Cephas, and John, who had a reputation as pillars, recognized the grace that had been given to me, they gave to Barnabas and me the right hand of fellowship, agreeing that we would go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

10 They requested only that we remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do.

In previous Lessons, we have stated that in the first ten verses of **Galatians** chapter 2, Paul informs his readers about a visit that he made to Jerusalem fourteen years after his conversion. In all probability, this

visit was made at the time of the **Jerusalem Council** which was convened in A.D. 49 or 50.

The reason why Paul mentions this visit to Jerusalem in such detail, is because the Judaizers had misrepresented his meeting with the leaders of the Jerusalem church as an act of submission on his part and an acknowledgment of his inferiority to them. As we have seen, the facts of the case were that Paul had been received by James, Peter, and John in brotherly fellowship, and had been accorded full recognition as the Apostle to the Gentiles. The position of the Judaizers who insisted upon circumcision and the observing of the Mosaic Law had been defeated.

The Jerusalem Apostles, instead of siding with the Judaizers, came boldly over to Paul's side. They acknowledged that his message was of divine origin and affirmed it as God's truth without reservation. Not only did the Apostles in Jerusalem not provide Paul with any additional information relative to the content of the Gospel, but on the contrary, they wholeheartedly endorsed both his ministry and his message. They recognized that he had been entrusted with the Gospel to the Gentiles, by the same authority that had entrusted to Peter the Gospel to the Jews. They recognized his apostleship as being on the same level with that of Peter's.

The leaders of the Jerusalem church perceived the favour that had been shown to Paul by the Lord Jesus Christ, in conferring the ministry of an Apostle upon him, and so abundantly blessing his labours among the Gentiles. They publicly endorsed his ministry and message by extending to Barnabas and himself "*the right hand of fellowship,*" an idiom which means to make an agreement usually with the shaking of hands. In this case it was not just a shaking of hands but a sharing of mission and purpose, the proclamation of the Gospel to all mankind.

In verse **10**, Paul writes, "*They requested only that we remember the poor, the very thing I also was eager to do.*"

Here Paul informs his readers that the only stipulation made by James, Peter and John, of Barnabas and himself was that they were to “*remember the poor.*” The word “*poor*” is the translation of a Greek word which describes a person who crouches and cowers, and is used as a noun to mean “beggar.” These poor persons were unable to meet their basic needs and so were forced to depend on others. In Classical Greek the word referred to a person who was reduced to total destitution, crouching in a corner begging. As he or she held out one hand to receive alms, he or she would often hide his or her face with the other hand, because he or she was ashamed of being recognized. In this case, the persons designated as “the poor,” were probably the poor saints in Jerusalem.

Brothers and sisters, for believers to take care of the poor is not only a practical responsibility but a spiritual one also. Indeed, to forsake that responsibility is to disobey God’s Word.

In **1 John 3:17**, we read the following: “*But whoever has the world’s possessions and sees his fellow Christian in need and shuts off his compassion against him, how can the love of God reside in such a person?*” (**New English Translation**)

In **James 2:15-16**, the Apostle James writes,

15 If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacks daily food,

16 and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, keep warm and eat well,” but you do not give them what the body needs, what good is it?

(**New English Translation**)

We must understand and appreciate brothers and sisters, that correct doctrine is never a substitute for Christian duty. Indeed, correct doctrine is only profitable if it enhances Christian duty.

Paul had always been interested in helping the poor. He says that helping the poor was, “*the very thing I also was eager to do.*” The Greek word

translated “eager” is **spoudazó**: (**spoo-dad’-zo**), which means, “to make haste, to give diligence; to exert oneself, endeavour,” The idea is not only “to be willing, to do with eagerness,” but “to make diligent effort.” It does not refer merely to Paul’s state of mind, but to his activity in relieving the necessities of the poor saints at Jerusalem.

There are a number of passages which attest to Paul’s eagerness to help the poor. We will read four of these passages from the **New English Translation**.

Acts 11:27-30

27 At that time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch.

28 One of them, named Agabus, got up and predicted by the Spirit that a severe famine was about to come over the whole inhabited world. (This took place during the reign of Claudius.)

29 So the disciples, each in accordance with his financial ability, decided to send relief to the brothers living in Judea.

30 They did so, sending their financial aid to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 24:17

“After several years I came to bring to my people gifts for the poor and to present offerings.”

Romans 15:25-27

25 But now I go to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.

26 For Macedonia and Achaia are pleased to make some contribution for the poor among the saints in Jerusalem.

27 For they were pleased to do this, and indeed they are indebted to the Jerusalem saints. For if the Gentiles have shared in their spiritual things, they are obligated also to minister to them in material things.

1 Corinthians 16:1-4

1 With regard to the collection for the saints, please follow the directions that I gave to the churches of Galatia:

2 On the first day of the week, each of you should set aside some income and save it to the extent that God has blessed you, so that a collection will not have to be made when I come.

3 Then, when I arrive, I will send those whom you approve with letters of explanation to carry your gift to Jerusalem.

4 And if it seems advisable that I should go also, they will go with me.

Regarding this matter, **Donald Campbell** comments as follows:

"The only request from the leaders in Jerusalem was that Paul remember the poor which he affirmed he was eager to do. It had been concern for the poor which brought Paul to Jerusalem in order to bring them financial relief...It was the same concern which motivated him on his third missionary journey to raise large welfare offerings for needy Christians in Jerusalem...Such offerings would alleviate human suffering, but they would also demonstrate genuine concern on the part of Gentile Christians for Jewish Christians. This in turn would help promote unity and love among believers and help prevent the kinds of misunderstandings which were undermining the Galatian churches."

At the end of his commentary on **Galatians 2:10**, **Warren Wiersbe** wrote the following:

"The curtain falls on this drama, but it will go up to reveal another. Once again God's 'freedom fighter' will have to defend the truth of the Gospel, this time before Peter."

Lord willing, in our next study we will look at this new act in the drama, ***"Contending for the Gospel."***