

# **A DEFENCE OF THE AUTHENTIC GOSPEL: A STUDY OF GALATIANS**

## **(LESSON SEVENTEEN)**

### ***“CONTENDING FOR THE GOSPEL” (PART 3)***

#### **GALATIANS 2:1-5**

#### **(NEW ENGLISH TRANSLATION)**

*1 Then after fourteen years I went up to Jerusalem again with Barnabas, taking Titus along too.*

*2 I went there because of a revelation and presented to them the gospel that I preach among the Gentiles. But I did so only in a private meeting with the influential people, to make sure that I was not running—or had not run—in vain.*

*3 Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek.*

*4 Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves.*

*5 But we did not surrender to them even for a moment, in order that the truth of the gospel would remain with you.*

In previous Lessons, we have stated that the visit to Jerusalem mentioned by Paul in **Galatians 2:1**, was in all probability made at the time of the **Jerusalem Council** which was convened in A.D. 49 or 50.

The issue confronting the Jerusalem Council was whether or not the Gentiles who converted to Christianity, should be required to be

circumcised and observe the ceremonial regulations of the Law of Moses. The heart of the controversy concerned the Gospel itself. The position of the Judaizers was that the Gentile believers must be circumcised and come under the provisions of the Old Testament law. If they failed to do so, the ongoing process of salvation in their lives would be jeopardized. By this they implied that the Gentile believers would lose the salvation they had already received if they did not become Jews and undergo circumcision. The requirement that the Gentiles believers convert to Judaism constituted a serious threat to the Authentic Gospel.

The church in Antioch, which had emerged as the headquarters of Gentile Christianity, deputized Paul and Barnabas along with others to represent them at the council. In **Galatians 2:1**, Paul mentions the names of two of the men who accompanied him to Jerusalem. These were Barnabas and Titus. Barnabas was a Jew who preached the Gospel of grace to the Gentiles as did Paul. He had accompanied Paul on the first missionary trip, and had witnessed God's blessings on the Gospel that was proclaimed among the Gentiles.

The other associate, Titus, was an uncircumcised Gentile, converted to Christ through the Gospel of grace. By taking Titus with himself and Barnabas, Paul was forcing the issue of grace to come out into the open so it could be dealt with by the Apostles and elders.

In verse **2**, Paul informs his readers that when he went to Jerusalem he secured a private meeting with the acknowledged leaders of the Jerusalem church with a view to outlining the Gospel which he, Barnabas and others had been preaching to the Gentiles. His reason for doing so was to make sure that he, "*was not running—or had not run—in vain.*"

We must not understand by this that Paul was concerned that his past fruitful labours which had resulted in the conversion of many Jews and Gentiles, and the establishing of several churches, would be rendered null and void simply because he did not receive the approval of the Jerusalem church. Paul was in no doubt whatsoever about the

authenticity of either his message or his ministry, for, according to **Galatians 1:12**, he had “*received it by a revelation of Jesus Christ.*” What he was concerned about was the future of the Gospel among the Gentiles, because this was his specific ministry from Christ. If the Apostles in Jerusalem sided with the Judaizers, or tried to compromise the purity of the Gospel, then Paul’s ministry would be in jeopardy. He wanted to get their approval before the issue was discussed at the general assembly.

In verse **3** Paul writes, “*Yet not even Titus, who was with me, was compelled to be circumcised, although he was a Greek.*”

As we noted earlier, and in previous Lessons, one of the features of the anti-Gospel teachings of the Judaizers was the necessity that the Gentiles who accepted Christianity also be circumcised. Paul was aware of this and so it was a strategic move on his part to bring Titus, an uncircumcised Gentile, with him to the Jerusalem council, and to introduce him as a test case.

The word “*Greek*” here does not refer to a person who was born in Greece, but to a Gentile who participated in Greek culture and spoke Greek, the common language of the Roman Empire. The terms “Greek” and “Gentile” became interchangeable. A Gentile was anyone who was not a Jew.

Paul reasoned that if Titus was compelled to be circumcised, then other Gentile believers would have to be circumcised also, which in effect would be to uphold “*another gospel.*” (**Galatians 1:6-7**). Those who supported such a decision, even if it were the Apostles themselves, would, in Paul’s view, be “*condemned to hell!*” (**Galatians 1:8-9**). His own ministry would also be discredited.

On the other hand if Titus was not compelled to be circumcised, then the Gospel that he preached, the one that he had received from Jesus Christ

Himself, would be authenticated and his ministry among the Gentiles would be approved.

Paul's apprehensions proved to be groundless however, because the leaders of the Jerusalem church did not even suggest that Titus should be circumcised. The context clearly indicates that strong pressure was brought to bear upon the Jerusalem church to impose circumcision upon the Gentile converts and Titus was the individual around whom the controversy was being waged. But the leaders of the church, both privately and publicly, upheld the decision of the Antioch church to the effect that circumcision was not to be required of the Gentile converts.

It is important for us to understand that Paul was not against circumcision per se. He had even persuaded Timothy, another of his associates in the Gospel to be circumcised. In **Acts 16:1-3** Luke records the incident:

*1 He [Paul] also came to Derbe and to Lystra. A disciple named Timothy was there, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but whose father was a Greek.*

*2 The brothers in Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.*

*3 Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him, and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was Greek.*

**(New English Translation)**

**Warren Wiersbe**, the former director of the "***Back to the Bible***" radio ministry, made the following insightful comments in respect of Paul's seeming inconsistency in respect Titus and Timothy as it relates to circumcision.

"Was Paul being inconsistent by refusing to circumcise Titus, yet agreeing to circumcise Timothy? No, because two different issues were involved. In the case of Timothy, Paul was not submitting to

Jewish Law in order to win him to Christ. Timothy was part Jew, part Gentile, and his lack of circumcision would have hindered his ministry among the people of Israel. Titus was a full Gentile, and for him to have submitted would have indicated that he was missing something in his Christian experience. To have circumcised Titus would have been cowardice and compromise; not to have circumcised Timothy would have been to create unnecessary problems in his ministry."

In verse 4, Paul makes reference to the group that insisted upon the circumcision of Titus. He writes, "*Now this matter arose because of the false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed to spy on our freedom that we have in Christ Jesus, to make us slaves.*"

Before we attempt to examine this verse, I believe it will help our understanding of the context to read **Galatians 2:1-4** from the **Message**:

*1 Fourteen years after that first visit, Barnabas and I went up to Jerusalem and took Titus with us.*

*2 I went to clarify with them what had been revealed to me. At that time I placed before them exactly what I was preaching to the non-Jews. I did this in private with the leaders, those held in esteem by the church, so that our concern would not become a controversial public issue, marred by ethnic tensions, exposing my years of work to denigration and endangering my present ministry.*

*3 Significantly, Titus, non-Jewish though he was, was not required to be circumcised.*

*4 While we were in conference we were infiltrated by spies pretending to be Christians, who slipped in to find out just how free true Christians are. Their ulterior motive was to reduce us to their brand of servitude.*

The phrase, "*false brothers with false pretenses who slipped in unnoticed,*" is no doubt a reference to the Judaizers.

**Kenneth Wuest** explains that, "There were three parties in the Jerusalem controversy: Paul and Barnabas who maintained that *Gentile* converts were not to be circumcised, the false brethren who demanded that they be circumcised, and the Jerusalem apostles who for the sake of expediency were urged by the false brethren to insist that Paul and Barnabas require circumcision of their *Gentile* converts. The false brethren were the Judaizers who were sneaked into the Jerusalem council, whose purpose it was to bring both Jew and *Gentile* under the Mosaic law."

The phrase, "*false brothers*" is a translation of the Greek word, **pseudadelphos**: (**psyoo-dad'-el-fos**), which is derived from **pseudes** (false) and **adelphós** (brother). According to **Thayer's Greek Lexicon**, the word refers to, "a false brother, i. e. one who ostentatiously professes to be a Christian, but is destitute of Christian knowledge and piety." These persons **profess** faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, but they do not **possess** genuine faith. They appear to be genuine believers but in reality they are staunch adversaries of the truth of the Gospel. The fact that Paul calls them "false brothers" indicates that they were not genuine believers, but were only masquerading as such in order to have their way at the council.

These imposters pretended to be followers of Christ, having somehow infiltrated the ranks of the church with the objective of destroying the doctrine of grace from within the church. They were aware that the best way to do so was to enslave genuine believers with a works-based, performance-driven system of religion, which included conditions in addition to faith in Jesus Christ for **meriting** salvation, rituals in order to **receive** salvation, and righteous works in order to **maintain** salvation.

The New Testament scholar, **John Gresham Machen** made the following comments in respect of the term "false brothers:"

"Brother' in Paul's Epistles means 'fellow-Christian,' and thus a 'false brother' is a man who claims to be a Christian or is thought to be a

Christian and yet is not, or does not show himself by his present actions to be a Christian at all. It is not a pleasant term, but the reason why it is not a pleasant term is that the thing that it designated was not a pleasant thing. These Judaizers might have seemed to a superficial observer to be true disciples, but in their heart of hearts, Paul seems to mean, they were Pharisees rather than disciples of Jesus Christ. They were depending upon their own works for salvation, and according to the apostle Paul a man cannot possibly do that if he is to be saved. So Paul calls them false brethren. Unlike the leaders of the modern Church the apostle Paul believed in calling things by their true names."

Brothers and sisters, if we have made a profession of faith in Jesus Christ, we must ask ourselves if we possess Christ, or more importantly, if He possess us. There may be many who attend church services and are involved in ministry who have professed Christ. They may have prayed the "sinner's prayer, they may have "tarried" at an altar, they may have been baptized, and they may have spoken words or phrases that were unintelligible. But they have not been possessed by the Holy Spirit, and they do not therefore belong to Christ! They are still "*dead in trespasses and sins,*" and are headed for a Christ-less eternity.

How may we know if we are indeed possessors of faith? How can we be certain that we are professors who has been possessed? In **2 Corinthians 5:17** we read the following: "*So then, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; what is old has passed away—look, what is new has come!*" (**New English Translation**)

Does this verse accurately describe our lives? Do we have new desires, new affections, new habits and new goals and aims? Paul is not speaking of **perfection** in this passage, but he is speaking of a new **direction**. Have our lives been significantly changed since we professed Christ? If the answer is yes, then we can be assured that we are born again and eternally secure in Christ! If the answer in no, then we need to soberly consider the words of the Lord Jesus Christ in **Matthew 7:21-23**:

21 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven—only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven.*

22 *On that day, many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn’t we prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many powerful deeds in your name?’*

23 *Then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you. Go away from me, you lawbreakers!’*

**(New English Translation)**

Paul says that these false brothers, *“slipped in unnoticed.”* The phrase is the translation of a Greek word which literally describes something that has been brought in by the side of something else. The word conveys the sense of being brought in secretly, or under false pretenses. The word was used of spies or traitors who infiltrate an opposing camp. **Strabo**, the Greek historian and philosopher, who was a contemporary of Paul, used the word to speak of enemies introduced secretly into a city by traitors within the walls. The presence of the definite article before *“false brethren”* in the Greek text, indicates that the Galatian believers knew exactly who they were.

The word is in a construction which speaks of the earlier intrusion of these persons into the Christian churches. This indicates a gradual infiltration of these false brothers who had made a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus as their Messiah, but who knew nothing of salvation through His precious blood. They still were clinging to the works-based system of salvation espoused by apostate and legalistic Judaism, a system which they desired to bring into the Church itself. This is one of Satan’s tactics, to subtly infiltrate a body of believers and bring them into bondage by adding extra-biblical requirements for salvation.

In **2 Peter 2:1** the Apostle Peter warns his readers about the destructive heresies of false prophets. He writes, *“But false prophets arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you. These false*

*teachers will infiltrate your midst with destructive heresies, even to the point of denying the Master who bought them. As a result, they will bring swift destruction on themselves.*” (**New English Translation**).

The phrase, “*infiltrate your midst,*” is a translation of the same Greek word translated, “*slipped in unnoticed*” in **Galatians 2:4**.

The expression, “*false brothers with false pretenses,*” captures the emphatic force of Paul’s expression, which labels both these “brothers” as well as their motives as false.

Jude describes a similar scene of subtle enemy infiltration into the church in verses **3** and **4** of his letter:

*3 Dear friends, although I have been eager to write to you about our common salvation, I now feel compelled instead to write to encourage you to contend earnestly for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints.*

*4 For certain men have secretly slipped in among you—men who long ago were marked out for the condemnation I am about to describe—ungodly men who have turned the grace of our God into a license for evil and who deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*  
(**New English Translation**)

Regarding the phrase, “*secretly slipped in,*” **William Barclay** makes the following comments:

“The Greek...is a very expressive word. It is used of the spacious and seductive words of a clever pleader seeping gradually into the minds of a judge and jury; it is used of an outlaw slipping secretly back into the country from which he has been expelled; it is used of the slow and subtle entry of innovations into the life of state, which in the end undermine and break down the ancestral laws. It always indicates a stealthy insinuation of something evil into a society or situation. Certain evil men had insinuated themselves into the church. They were

the kind of men for whom judgment was waiting. They were impious creatures, godless in their thought and life."

We will conclude our Lesson this evening with a quote from the Greek New Testament scholar **Kenneth Wuest**:

"There is a Greek word in **2 Corinthians 11:13-15** which admirably describes the methods of the Modernist, who takes after his father, the Devil. It is **metaschématizó**: [met-askh-ay-mat-id'-zo] translated 'transformed.' It refers to the act of an individual changing his outward expression by assuming an expression put on from the outside, an expression that does not come from nor is it representative of what he is in his inner character. Lucifer did that after he struck at God's throne and became the fallen angel, Satan. As a fallen angel he gave expression to his sin-darkened heart. But he knew that he could not attract the human race that way. He must impersonate God if he expected to be worshipped as God. He therefore assumed an outward expression of light, put on from the outside and not representative of his inner sinful being. He disguised himself as an angel of light. His ministers... Modernistic preachers, have done the same...Using evangelical terms such as 'salvation, faith, regeneration, atonement, resurrection,' they put their own private meanings upon them (which negate the orthodox view), and pose as orthodox exponents of Christianity. Reader, do not trust a Modernist any farther than you would a rattlesnake. A rattlesnake will give you warning before it strikes, but not a Modernist. The eternal welfare of your soul depends upon what you believe regarding the person and work of our Lord on the Cross."