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Galatians

Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with *me*. Galatians 2:1

Paul now mentions a period of "fourteen years" until he again "went up to Jerusalem." There is great debate as to which starting period he is speaking of, his conversion or since his previous trip to Jerusalem. If from his conversion, he is stating that the period covers everything since verse 1:15. If from his last trip to Jerusalem, it is speaking of the details of verse 1:18.

Either way, Paul says that he "again" went up to Jerusalem. This indicates that something important transpired during this visit which occurred around 14-20 years after his conversion (the timing depends on how this verse and verse 1:18 are considered). In the interim, Paul had gone to Jerusalem (see Acts 11:29, 30 & Acts 12:25) on a mission trip for relief of the saints there during a famine. And yet, he doesn't mention this. This is passed over then because it does not bear on what he is speaking of in this letter to the Galatians.

However, the trip to Jerusalem which he now refers to goes directly to the heart of the matter concerning the apostasy of those in Galatia. For this reason, he "went up" again to Jerusalem. As always, the noting of a trip to Jerusalem includes the idea of ascending. Regardless of the point on the compass, or the elevation from which one goes there, it is always considered a trip "up." It is as if a throne in

a court is being approached for a decision on a matter. Such is certainly the case here.

The record of this trip is found in Acts 15, and it is known as the Council in Jerusalem. A matter of great importance was to be settled there. Unfortunately, despite the obvious nature of the ruling, its edicts were ignored by those in Galatia, and they have continued to be ignored by the foolish since then. On this trip, Paul notes that he went with Barnabas. As a fellow apostle and a central figure in the earlier workings of the church, it was a logical choice.

Barnabas was a Jew and his presence filled an important point for those at the council to consider. He had participated in Paul's evangelistic efforts and he was able to confirm the message which Paul preached among the Gentiles. But to ensure that the message was perfectly understood, Paul next notes that he "also took Titus" with him.

The reason for bringing Titus along is to confirm the gospel message which Paul preached elsewhere. It will be explained precisely in the coming verses. Titus is not specifically mentioned as having gone with Paul in Acts 15, but the account does say "that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them" went up to Jerusalem. Titus would be among the "certain others" and his importance in having gone will now be seen in this epistle to the Galatians.

Life application: Bible study is hard work. Sometimes, piecing together a timeline of the events of what occurs seems like a lot of hard work with no set gain to be realized. However, this is not the case. The Bible rewards those who diligently seek the Lord through it. Our doctrine is only as good as our willingness to pursue what is sound. Picking and choosing what we will believe based on random verses will inevitably lead to faulty doctrine, but it is so much easier than diligently studying the word. However, easy is only rewarding in the short term. In the long run, having right doctrine will receive eternal rewards.

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. Galatians 2:2

This is referring to Paul's trip to Jerusalem with Barnabas and Titus. Paul received revelation that there was trouble coming and eventually, according to Acts 15:2, it turned into a great dissension within the church -

"Therefore, when Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and dispute with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas and certain others of them should go up to Jerusalem, to the apostles and elders, about this question." Acts 15:2

Having received revelation of this kind was certainly to quiet him and give him the confidence he needed to know that he was on the right path. His words in this verse show us this. Upon his arrival in Jerusalem, he "communicated to them." The communication was to those who would soon render a decision at the Council in Jerusalem. Paul first spoke in private with them in order to ensure they knew, in advance, that a dissension had arisen. Thus they would be prepared for the challenge that lay ahead in the deliberations.

What he specifically communicated was "the gospel which I preach to the Gentiles." This is written in the present-tense for a good reason. The gospel he had preached; the gospel he had presented to the leaders and the council at Jerusalem; the gospel he continued to preach after that; and the gospel he still preached, even to the Galatians at the present time, was a consistent message. It had not changed.

It was this same gospel that he communicated "privately to those who were of reputation." These words are also in the present tense in the Greek. Therefore, they are more appropriately rendered "to them of repute." Again, the present tense is necessary to understand that those who approved of his gospel message to the Gentiles were the same people who were still the ones who continued to approve of it.

Paul is showing that the false apostles' claim that they had the true gospel was, in fact, what was false. They may have pretended to come under the authority of the leaders in Jerusalem, but this was not so. The same people who were authorities in Jerusalem at that time were still the authorities in Jerusalem, and it was Paul and his gospel message that they backed. If they had any doubt of this, all they would need to do is send a message to inquire whether this was true or not. However, Paul's continued words of the letter will even make that unnecessary. By the time he is done, they will see that his message was the very intent of God for the Gentile people.

To finish this verse, he notes that his meeting with these leaders was to find out if "by any means I might run, or had run, in vain." The intent of Paul's visit, and the calling of a council by the leaders, was to settle the matter of Paul's gospel as he conveyed it to the Gentiles. Therefore, his words here are not questioning the possibility that his labors were in vain, as if he was the one who was misguided all along. Instead, his words are directed as to whether or not they understood and supported his work, as if they were not yet satisfied in their understanding of the message he preached. Vincent's Word Studies paraphrases the verse and then explains it thus -

"I laid before them that gospel which I preach to the Gentiles, that they might examine and settle for themselves the question whether I am not possibly running or had run in vain.' The investigation was to be for their satisfaction, not for Paul's."

Life application: Paul's message was presented to the leaders in Jerusalem for evaluation. The Bible shows that what he preached to the Gentiles was proper. He was given their full support and approval. Therefore, to understand proper church-age doctrine, we are to turn to the letters of Paul. If this is not so, then we have no sure word at all. Be sure to stand fast on what Paul teaches. It is the message approved by the Lord Jesus for the proper conduct of our Christian walk.

Yet not even Titus who *was* with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. Galatians 2:3

Though verses 3 through 5 are parenthetical, the very core of the message of Galatians is found in this verse now. Paul had gone up to Jerusalem in order to meet with the leaders there. When he went, he took Titus along with him. Titus was a Greek and a saved believer in Jesus Christ. He was with Paul at the meeting and yet he was not "compelled to be circumcised."

From this verse, Paul will carefully and methodically detail his argument concerning the bondage of the Law of Moses; the truth that circumcision is not required for salvation; and the fact that this truth is even seen in Abraham, the father of the faith of the Hebrew people. Paul will use circumcision as a benchmark in his argument against any deed of the Law of Moses being required for salvation.

If this most important aspect of being brought into the covenant people was not considered necessary for salvation through Jesus Christ, then nothing else would be as well. Circumcision first goes back to Genesis 17 -

"And God said to Abraham: 'As for you, you shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout their generations. ¹⁰ This *is* My covenant which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: Every male child among you shall be circumcised; ¹¹ and you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskins, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. ¹² He who is eight days old among you shall be circumcised, every male child in your generations, he who is born in your house or bought with money from any foreigner who is not your descendant. ¹³ He who is born in your house and he who is bought with your money must be circumcised, and My covenant shall be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. ¹⁴ And the uncircumcised male child, who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant.'" Genesis 17 :9-14

Later, it is noted that for a foreigner to come into the fold, they were required to be circumcised -

"This *is* the ordinance of the Passover: No foreigner shall eat it. ⁴⁴ But every man's servant who is bought for money, when you have circumcised him, then he may eat it. ⁴⁵ A sojourner and a hired servant shall not eat it. ⁴⁶ In one house it shall be eaten; you shall not carry any of the flesh outside the house, nor shall you break one of its bones. ⁴⁷ All the congregation of Israel shall keep it. ⁴⁸ And when a stranger dwells with you *and wants* to keep the Passover to the LORD, let all his males be circumcised, and then let him come near and keep it; and he shall be as a native of the land." Exodus 12:43-48

Without meeting this most important requirement, there was to be no inclusion of that person among the covenant people. And yet, Titus was already saved and he was there among the leaders of the church. If those same leaders determined that circumcision for Titus was required, the entire message of grace through faith would crumble and the church would be brought back into legalism and bondage. However, he was not compelled to be circumcised and the truth that Christ is the fulfillment of this requirement, and all of the Law of Moses, was realized and solidified for all time.

Understanding this precept concerning this most important aspect of Jewish covenant life, we can look at any lesser aspect and know that it is also set aside because of the work of Christ. Church doctrine then is established from this point on. As this occurred in Acts 15 where the decision was published for all the Gentile churches to read and accept, then we can know that Paul's epistles set the parameters for church doctrine and conduct as they are rendered after that point in time and they follow immediately after the book of Acts.

Life application: If someone tells you that you need to be circumcised in order to be saved, tell them, "Take a hike, heretic." Stand fast on your faith in the grace of Jesus Christ alone.

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), Galatians 2:4

This verse is referring to the previous one where Paul said that not even Titus, who was a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised. His words now build upon that. Paul would not budge on this issue because it would lead not to freedom, but to bondage. This attempt to have Titus circumcised was "because of false brethren." The term Paul uses to describe them is found only here and in 2 Corinthians 11:26. It is those who were "brethren" in name only, but false in their Christian life. Paul uses an article (the false brethren) to show that they were by this time a well-known group of miscreants. They were anti-grace Judaizers who wanted control over the body, not freedom for it.

These false brethren were "secretly brought in." The word used for this is *pareisaktos*. It is found only here in the New Testament and it means, "brought in by the side, and so insidiously and illegally." Vincent's Word Studies says that they were, "Brought in, not from Jerusalem into the church at Antioch, nor into the Pauline churches generally, but into the Christian brotherhood to which they did not rightfully belong."

Paul continues his words by saying that these worthless false brethren, are those "who came in by stealth to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus." Charles Ellicott notes that the terms "came in by stealth" and "secretly brought in" are words which "correspond to each other in the Greek, and bring out in a graphic and forcible way the insidious and designing character of the party most violently opposed to St. Paul. Professing to be Christians, they were really Jews of the narrowest sort, who only entered into the Church to spy into and restrict its liberties."

In other words, not only were they false brethren, but they were those who actively worked against the truth of the gospel. Some false brethren may come in and want to leech off the fellowship. Others might just want something to do or someone to fellowship with, even if they don't believe what is being discussed by

the brothers. But these people had a set and perverse agenda to destroy the truth of the grace of Christ. It is an agenda with a specific purpose which was "that they might bring us into bondage."

If the grace of Christ is that which brings freedom and liberty, then something opposed to it can only bring bondage. Paul will very clearly explain in his words to come that the Law of Moses is bondage. It can only show us what is sinful, but it can in no way free us from our sin. Only Christ can do that. The false brethren knew that if they could diminish the grace of Christ, those who believed their message would be brought into bondage. And anyone in bondage has someone over them to enforce that state. Thus, their intent was a power-grab and their desire was to be the ones in power over the Galatians.

Life application: If you believe that You should be observing any or all of the Law of Moses, you have been deceived. If you teach that to others, you are a heretic. Don't be a deceived and don't be a heretic. Receive the freedom which truly sets you free. Receive Christ Jesus.