

Galatians 1: 18 – 2: 5; “Apostolic Liberty and Submission”, Message # 7
in the series – “Christ Has Made Us Free, A Bible Study conducted
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The experience of the Apostle Paul, after he was converted to Jesus Christ, is really very interesting indeed. It shows us something that is very important for every Christian to understand. It shows us that God has an individual plan for every Christian's life; a personal plan for them, that He leads them by. According to these verses God led Paul into all the truth of what He wanted him personally do, so that it would be shown to all men that the gospel was not of men. We have already seen that when Paul was converted that he did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, nor did he go up to those who were apostles before him, but he went away to Arabia and returned after that to Damascus, the city that he was from. The reason that God led the Apostle Paul this way was not because He wanted him or other Christians to think that they should live a life independent of Church authority as it was vested in the 12 apostles. It was to show all men that He was sovereign in the way that He established that Apostolic authority at that time. This revelation of what God did with Paul is given to speak to us today. Let us examine 1st - The issue of Apostolic liberty and our own liberty. (verses 18-23 of Chapter 1) 2nd – The issue of Apostolic submission and our own submission. (Chapter 2, verses 1-3) And 3rd – The issue of Apostolic Unity and our own unity with them. (verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 2)

1st - The issue of Apostolic liberty and our own liberty. (verses 18-23 of Chapter 1)

“Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days.” “But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord's brother.” “Afterward I went into the regions of Syria and Cilicia.” “And I was unknown by face to the churches of Judea which were in Christ.” “But they were hearing only, ‘He who formerly persecuted us now preaches the faith which he once tried to destroy.’” After 3 years refers to 3 years after He was called by Christ; after he was converted on the road to Damascus. During those three years we are not told how long Paul was in Arabia and Damascus. Suffice it to say, that he was having dealings with God and Christ in solitude which prepared him for his ministry, and He was preaching publicly as well during that time. For confirmation of this, turn with me to Acts Chapter 9, verse 20. “Immediately he preached the Christ in the synagogues, that He is the Son of God.” “Then all who heard were amazed, and said, ‘Is this not he who destroyed those who called on this name, in Jerusalem, and has come here for that purpose, so that he might bring them bound to the chief priests?’” “But Saul increased all the more in strength, and confounded the Jews who dwelt in Damascus, proving that this

Jesus is the Christ.” “Now after many days were past, the Jews plotted to kill him.” “But their plot became known to Saul.” “And they watched the gates day and night, to kill him.” “Then the disciples took him by night and let him down through the wall in a large basket.” “And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he tried to join the disciples; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple.” “But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles.” “And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.” “And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.” “When the brethren found out, they brought him down to Caesarea and sent him out to Tarsus.”

Now, we need to notice some things here. Saul, who already had his heavenly call from Christ on the road to Damascus, did not immediately confer with flesh and blood, as verse 16 of Galatians 1 says. Nor did he immediately go up to Jerusalem to the apostles who were before him. He instead began to proclaim Christ and the gospel in Damascus. It was after many days were past, (this was during the 3 years mentioned in Galatians 1: 18) the Jews plotted to kill him. And 2nd Corinthians 11: 32 confirms what is said here in Acts 9: 23-25, that “in Damascus the governor, under Aretas the king, was guarding the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desiring to arrest me; but I was let down through a window in the wall, and escaped from his hands.” It was after this escape from Damascus, that he evidently went to Arabia, and I assume, spent his time there in communion with God over what kind of a ministry he would have among the Jews and the Gentiles. Then he went up to Jerusalem to see Peter. When he got there, he tried to join with the disciples, but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. This was not all of the 12 apostles but only those who were in Jerusalem at that time; Peter and James. Barnabas was able to relate to them what Saul had done thus far in his boldly preaching for Christ, and he was able to win their confidence to let Saul continue to meet with them in the church there in Jerusalem. While he was there, for those 2 weeks, he met and spoke privately with Peter and also publicly preached in the name of Jesus and boldly disputed against the Hellenists; those Greek-speaking Jews whom Stephen had originally preached to. And they tried to kill Saul as well. The brethren hearing of this, sent Saul off to Tarsus, where he resided until Barnabas came looking for him in Acts 11: 25. When he found him, he brought him to Antioch to help teach the disciples there. And this set the stage for the Lord’s calling Saul and Barnabas into missionary service in Acts Chapter 13.

I relate all of this to show you that the Apostle Paul, from the very beginning of his Christian life and ministry had Christian liberty given to him from Christ Himself to live where he wanted to live, and to minister where he wanted to minister, in connection with the leading of the Lord. He wanted to do exactly what

the Lord was leading him to do; not his own selfish will. In pursuing this, he was not compelled by any man to preach anything or do anything other than what the Lord had called him to do. He was the Lord's free man and knew the liberty which Christ Himself had brought him into. To verify this truth I would like you to turn over with me to 1 Corinthians 9: 1, and you will see how this truth is directly related by the Apostle Paul himself. "Am I not an apostle?" "Am I not free?" "Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?" "Are you not my work in the Lord?" In the immediate context which follows, we find that the Apostle, in making this declaration of freedom, was telling the church at Corinth that all ministers ought to be supported financially in their preaching of the gospel. The church which is benefitting from that man's teaching, and by his labors among them, ought to be supported. But in his particular case, Paul was declining this right to be paid because he wanted to preach to them the gospel without charge, that he might win the more people to Christ. Look down at verse 16. "For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast of, for necessity is laid upon me; yes woe is me if I do not preach the gospel!" "For if I do this willingly, I have a reward; but if against my will, I have been entrusted with a stewardship." "What is my reward then?" That when I preach the gospel, I may present the gospel of Christ without charge, that I may not abuse my authority in the gospel." "For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a servant to all, that I might win the more." This is the kind of liberty that the Apostle Paul had, and it is the kind of liberty that you and I have as well. It is to be able to free from all men's authority that we might serve Christ by making ourselves a servant to all, that we may win the more. We are free from all men, in order to better serve Christ and God according to what Christ has called us to in our involvement with the local church.

2nd – Let's look at the issue of Apostolic submission and our own submission. (Chapter 2, verses 1-3)

"Then after fourteen years I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and also took Titus with me." "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." "Yet not even Titus who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised." Here we see that even though Paul had been preaching the true gospel of Jesus Christ, that gospel which states that a person is only saved by faith in Jesus, that there were some Jews who claimed to be Christians at that time, who were insisting that circumcision was to be required of all who had believed in Jesus. Paul and Barnabas went up to Jerusalem over this matter, taking with them Titus also. Paul went because God through Christ had given him revelation that he should go. And so he privately submit the gospel which he preached, to "those who were of reputation", so that they could verify by their own evaluation and statements, the truth of the matter. He did this, he says, in order that he might find out whether he might have "run" or "had run" in vain. That is; he needed to know if all of his

preaching and labors in the gospel were based on a false gospel instead of the true one. Because if so, he would have done all of this work in vain. The truth is the truth; and a false gospel God will not bless to save anyone. Paul did not do this because he was fearful that his gospel was a false one, but because he knew that the truth of something this important very much needed the attestation of other apostolic witnesses. The Outcome? It was that not even Titus, who was a Greek, was required to be circumcised.

Paul's willingness to have the gospel that he preached be examined by other apostles and godly witnesses has lessons for us as well. I, and all pastors and preachers, ought to be willing at all times to submit the gospel that we preach to other godly Bible-believing ministers so that it can be examined, if there is a need to do so, to see if it is orthodox. And we can go further. Every Christian ought to be able to state what is being required of them in relation to the gospel of Jesus Christ so that they can know that they will be saved. What is required? It is faith alone in what Jesus Christ has done for me, the sinner; faith in His righteous life and sacrificial death on the cross. And it is faith also in Christ's resurrection, for His resurrection proves that God was satisfied with Jesus' work, and that He has the power to save me from my sins. Nothing more than faith in Christ is required of any person in order to be saved. The true gospel is established upon facts concerning what Christ did for us as sinners, and the Apostles were all witnesses to those facts. When we believe in the Bible, and in the gospel, we are believing in the witness of the Apostles. Look over at Acts 5: 27 and you will see how this was lived out by the Apostles. "And when they had brought them, they set them before the council, and the high priest asked them, 'Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name?' "And look you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" "But Peter and the other apostles answered and said, 'We ought to obey God rather than men.'" "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus whom you murdered by hanging on a tree." "Him God has exalted to His right hand to be Prince and Savior; to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." "And we are His witnesses to these things, and so also is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey Him." A true Christian is always willing to have his doctrine of Christ and the gospel examined, but he is not willing to keep silent about it if it is being demanded of him; even if it being demanded by the government of church or state. You, dear Christian are a witness to Christ and the truth of the gospel. You are willing to submit your doctrine to those who are godly and faithful for examination. But you will not be willing to compromise the gospel for anything or anybody. Nothing can or should be added to what Christ has done, in order that a person might be saved.

3rd – Let's look at the issue of Apostolic Unity and our own unity with them. (verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 2)

"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.), to whom we did not yield submission even for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you. You can now see how needful it was for the Apostle Paul and Barnabas and the other Apostles of our Lord, to be in complete unity with one another over the truth of the gospel. False brethren had had been brought into the churches. They had come in by stealth to spy out the liberty of the brethren. It is the liberty of all true brethren is to be set free from having to keep the law in order to be justified in the sight of God. Those who perpetrate such a false gospel of adding the works of the law to faith in order to be saved, and so teach it to others, are intending to bring their hearers into bondage. The Apostles were united against this false doctrine, and we should be united with them. Turn to Acts Chapter 15 and you will see how the Apostles came to unity over these doctrines of the gospel. Verse 6 – “Now the apostles and elders came together to consider this matter.” “And when there had been much dispute, Peter rose up and said to them, ‘Men and brethren, you know that a good while ago God chose among us, that by my mouth the Gentiles should hear the word of the gospel and believe.’ “So God, who knows the heart, acknowledged them by giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He did to us, and made no distinction between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.” “Now, therefore, why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the disciples which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?” “But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved in the same manner as they.” This is proof that you should not yield submission to a false gospel, even for an hour. The truth of the gospel cannot long continue with us if we do. Let us be united with the Apostles, those men who wrote down the Word of God for us. For if we are united with them, and with each other, the truth of the gospel will continue and flourish, because the power of God through Jesus Christ our Lord, is in it.