

Galatians 1: 18 – 2: 5; “St. Paul’s Liberty and Submission”, Message # 7 in the series – “Christ has made us Free”, Delivered by Pastor Paul Rendall on May 31st, in the Afternoon Worship service.

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 St. Paul in this way was not because He wanted to teach him that he could live a life independent of Church authority, as it was vested in the 12 apostles. The reason that he wrote this way was to show all men that God was sovereign in the way that He established Paul’s authority as an apostle at that time.

However, this revelation of what God did with Paul, is also given to speak to us today, so that we will learn from Paul; how God led him, and caused him to understand what true liberty, unity, and submission are; and how God established these truths to him to that he understood their importance. So, I want us to examine, 1st of all – The issue of St. Paul’s liberty and our own liberty. (verses 18-23 of chapter 1) 2nd – The issue of St. Paul’s submission and our own submission. (chapter 2, verses 1-3) And then 3rd – The issue of St. Paul’s unity with the brethren, and our own unity with them. (verses 4 and 5 of Chapter 2) May the Lord give us insight into these matters, and work His precious grace into our hearts, so that we will live these truths out here in our own assembly.

1st - The issue of St. Paul’s 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 during much of that time he was having dealings with God and Christ in solitude; dealings which prepared him for his future ministry, and Paul was preaching publicly as well during that time.

For confirmation of this, I want you to turn with me over 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 chapter 1 says. Nor did he immediately go up to Jerusalem to the apostles who were before him, during all that time. Instead, he 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. The “apostles” mentioned here his were not all of the 12 apostles, but it was only those who were in Jerusalem at that time; namely, 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 he also publicly preached in the name of Jesus. He boldly disputed against the Hellenists; those Greek-speaking Jews whom Stephen had originally preached to. And they tried to kill Saul as well. But the brethren hearing of this, they 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 both 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 other than the gospel the Lord had revealed to him, or to do anything other than that which the Lord directed him to do. He was the Lord’s free man and he knew the liberty which Christ Himself had brought him into. To verify this truth I would like you to turn over with me to 1st Corinthians 9: 1, and you will see how this truth is directly related by the Apostle Paul himself. He says here – “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 full-time ministers ought to be supported financially in their preaching of the gospel.

Verse 14 – “Even so the Lord has commanded that those who preach the gospel should live from the gospel.” In other words, the church members who were regularly benefitting from that man’s teaching, and by his pastoral labors among them, ought to regularly contribute to that support. But in his particular case, Paul was declining this right to be paid. His reason was his “boast” that he was not like the false teachers who had come to them and had somehow wrangled money out them for their so-called preaching and teaching services. Because in verse 15 Paul says – “But I have used none of these things, nor have I written these things that it should be done so to me; for it would be better for me to die than that anyone should make my boasting void.” Paul was declining his right to be paid because he wanted to show them that salvation was free from having to be purchased. It was not of works. Rather, it cost Christ laying down His life for it. So, Paul

would preach to people the gospel without charge, so that he might win all 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.” You see, then, that this is the kind of liberty that the Apostle Paul had, back then, and it is the kind of liberty that you and I have now as well.

It is to be able to free from all men’s dictatorial authority in relation to living out a Biblically right principle, and how that principle is worked out practically. We claim freedom in the outworking of that principle, only in order that we might serve Christ better; that is, by making ourselves a servant to all, that we may win the more people to Christ. In this holy way, therefore, we are free from all men, so that we might serve Christ better, according to what Christ has called us to do, in our involvement with the local church.

2nd – Let’s look at the issue of St. Paul’s submission to authority, 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 still 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 submitted to them, 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 he had been wrong about the gospel, he would have done all of his previous 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.

What was the outcome of that interview? 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. The first is that 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. We should do this if there is any question of our orthodoxy in relation to the gospel. And we can go further than this. Every person who has made a profession of faith, ought to be able to state what was being required of them by God, in relation to the gospel, so that they will have the assurance of faith, that they have been saved.

What is required? It is faith alone in what Jesus Christ has done for me, the sinner; faith in His righteous life and His sacrificial death on the cross. That is what saves me. It is also a declaration of faith in Christ’s having been raised from the dead. For His resurrection proves that God was satisfied with Jesus’ work, and that Christ, the only-begotten of the Father, 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 those who are sinners, and the Apostles were all witnesses to those facts. When you believe in the word of God, and more specifically in the truth of the gospel, you are believing in the testimony of God the Father concerning His Son. And you are believing in the testimony of the apostles who have written God's word down for us so that you might believe.

If you look over at Acts 5, verse 27-32, 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 Church authorities or State authorities. You see, you dear Christian, you, like Paul are a witness to Christ and to the truth of the gospel. You are not an apostle, and you may never be a pastor, but you should be willing to submit your doctrine to those who are godly and faithful, if necessary, for their examination and comparison with the Bible. But you will not be willing to compromise the gospel, or change it one iota, 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 St. Paul's unity with the brethren, 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 secretly come into the churches. They had come in by stealth to spy out the liberty of the true brethren. 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, those persons are intending to bring their hearers into bondage. 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.

The Apostles were united against this false doctrine, and we should be united with them. Listen to Acts Chapter 15 and you will see how the Apostles came to unity over these doctrines of the gospel. Verse 6 says – "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." You see, 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, and continue in their doctrine. They are the men who Christ called and appointed. They are the men who wrote down the Word of God for us. If we are united with them, and with each other, agreeing in all of the orthodox doctrines of work, and unity in the truth as we preach the gospel, our church will continue and flourish, because God will be with us to establish it.

