

CHAPTER 2

Second visit, to clarify his gospel (2:1-10)

Fourteen years later (after the first visit?

¹), he went up again to Jerusalem, together with Barnabas and Titus. This visit (v 2):

- was in response to a revelation;
- was to communicate with the leaders the gospel he preached.

This was after (v 4-5) “false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the *freedom* we have in Christ Jesus and to make us *slaves*. We did not give in to them for a moment ...”

The leaders James, Peter (Cephas) and John (reputed to be pillars) (v 9):

- (v 3) did not compel Titus (a Gentile) to be circumcised – brought as a living proof?
- (v 6b) they added nothing to Paul's message (*did not teach him anything*)
- (v 7) recognised that Paul had been “entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles (literally “the gospel of the *foreskin*”²), just as Peter “to the Jews” (literally [gospel] “of the *circumcision*”³)
- (v 9) gave them the right hand of fellowship, recognising the grace given to him

N.B. The expression “seemed to be” (NIV in v 2, 6 and omitted in v 9) though literally translated, is not questioning the following fact but confirming and extending it, according to the use of many Greek writers.

Those leaders were not more important to Paul because of their position (or their walk with Jesus on earth). “... whatever they were makes no difference to me” (v 6). They were called by Jesus himself, as Paul was! So Paul did not mention their acceptance as a higher authority, but to show the Galatians that even they agreed with Paul; “they” who were men in high authority and probably used by the Judaist teachers to give their own teaching more authority.

Regarding circumcision, note that Timothy was circumcised by Paul not long afterwards, because he had a Jewish mother and a Gentile father.⁴ This may have been done to make Timothy more accepted in Jewish circles, as Paul usually started his mission in synagogues. See also:

- (1 Cor 7:18-19) Was a man already circumcised when he was called? He should not become uncircumcised. Was a man uncircumcised when he was called? He should not be circumcised. Circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing.
- (1 Cor 9:19-23) ... To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. ...

The question of dating this letter & Consequences for the decisions at the Jerusalem Council

Whether Galatians was written before or after the Jerusalem Council depends on whether this second visit, mentioned in Galatians, *is* that council or that Paul had a separate discussion with the leaders before or after this council visit. The report in Acts mentions two visits around that time that could be considered:

- the **relief visit** (Barnabas and Saul; 11:30 & 12:25) – *before* the first missionary journey

¹ Probably 14 years after conversion, because of dating issues.

² Gr *akrobestia* = foreskin; figuratively used here and in many other places as “uncircumcised”.

³ The Gr *peritome* is used in the NT for circumcision (the act) and for circumcised (the state).

⁴ Acts 16:3 “... because of the Jews who lived in that area, for they all knew that his father was a Greek.”

- the **council visit** (Paul and Barnabas; 15:2) – *after* the first missionary journey; they went “along with some other believers”, so Titus could certainly have been one of them
- Of course, we also cannot exclude the possibility that this Gal 2 visit to Jerusalem may not be recorded at all in Acts.

Problems with the opinion that the letter was written after that council:

- The council visit appears distinctly different from the visit in Gal 2
 - Acts 15 indicates a large gathering (v 6 “apostles and elders”; v 12 “whole assembly”; v 22 “apostles and elders, with the whole church”)
 - Gal 2 indicates private talks (v2 “privately ... leaders”; v 9 “James, Peter and John ... “they agreed ...”)
- The record in Galatians reports comprehensively on several relevant talks in Jerusalem, but does not even mention anything like such a Council meeting in Jerusalem, which could reasonably be expected if it had already happened.
- Regarding the concluding decisions or instructions:
 - Acts 15 results in clear and written requirements: (v 28-29) “... not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements: You are to abstain from
 - food sacrificed to idols,
 - from blood, [*eating this was strictly forbidden*]
 - from the meat of strangled animals [*whose blood could not have flowed freely*]
 - and from sexual immorality.⁵
 - The letter with these instructions was delivered in Antioch (v 30-31)
 - These decisions were also delivered from town to town during Paul’s second missionary journey (Acts 16:4), during which Paul was accompanied by Silas (from Jerusalem)
 - In stark contrast, in Gal 2:10, the three apostles only asked that they “should continue to remember the poor”, the very thing Paul was eager to do.
- As the decisions at this Council meeting largely strengthened the *principle* of Paul’s arguments and confirmed his ministry, why would he not have referred to them in any way? Why would he not have used this important *endorsement*? Also:
 - Gal 2:3 states that not even Titus (a Gentile) was compelled to be circumcised. After the council in Jerusalem this would have been very obvious.
 - The only other possibility could be that Paul deliberately ignored these requirements, failing to mention them. *But why would he?*
- Advocates of the position that the letter was written after the council usually conclude that the letter was written much later and to churches in North Galatia, which can only have been after the 2nd and 3rd missionary journeys, when Barnabas was no longer Paul’s companion. Why would he have mentioned Barnabas so prominently if these believers would not have known him?

For these reasons I can personally only conclude that Galatians must have been written before the Council at Jerusalem.⁶ However, does this then mean that these *later* decisions at the Council are more relevant to us than Paul’s message in Galatians?

This is an important question, “Are the food requirements in Acts 15 still valid for us?”

If these requirements were the agreed regulations for all the Christian Gentiles in the whole church, they could well be very valid. Naturally, there is no debate on the issue of sexual immorality, which is emphasised by Paul in many other places. However, there are various counter arguments regarding the food regulations:

- Romans is Paul’s most extensive and systematic doctrinal exposition, which covers the same issues, and was definitely written after the council, but it does not mention these food requirements. Even when he speaks in Rom 14 about freedom in eating and drinking he does not mention them, but simply states “no food is unclean in itself” (v 14), although he warns to consider the weakness of

⁵ Gr *porneia*.

⁶ Although various scholars conclude that the letter was written *after* the Jerusalem council, more recently many scholars (including Ramsey, Burton, Bruce and Longenecker) hold to the view of an earlier date.

others and not to be judgmental. After all, “the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking” (v 17).

- Paul’s instructions in 1 Corinthians 8 & 10, allowing the eating of meat sacrificed to idols, clearly differ from Acts 15, although he instructs to be wise in this, considering the reactions of both weak brothers and non-believers, and not to participate in idol feasts.
- In both cases, freedom seems to be given, within a framework of principles of love.

Therefore,

- it seems likely that in Paul's thinking the Jerusalem “council” was not a council in the sense of final authority over all the churches and that the Acts 15 food requirements were not an essential part of the gospel;
- the matter was probably only discussed in Jerusalem, because the Judaist teachers came from there and were promoting the going practice there – a local church issue needed resolving;
- the decisions were made “with the whole church” (v 22);
- the council's letter was written to “the Gentile believers in Antioch, Syria and Cilicia” and was sent to Antioch with Judas and Silas to confirm this (Acts 15:22-23), therefore not necessarily to all the existing churches of all times;
- the *requirements* are softened by the words “You will do well to avoid these things” (v28-29);
- it was possibly an issue for these particular churches, because they consisted of a mixture of Jewish and Gentile believers and these Jewish believers may have been easily offended by these particular food practices, which required a kind of ‘compromise’ to keep the parties in peace together.

Are there any other comparable NT regulations that we believe are no longer required in our time?

How can we be sure? Which could be temporary or cultural considerations, not essential to the gospel?

If it was only a temporary instruction, could Galatians possibly have been written after the council after all?

Opposing even Peter for his behaviour (2:11-21)

Paul met Peter on another occasion in Antioch (2:11-13). Peter used to eat with the Gentiles (forbidden to the Jews), but when certain men from James came he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles. In this, “they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel” (v14). Peter was afraid of “this circumcision group” (v12).

Their conduct led to confusion of *law* and the *gospel*, as it showed the Gentile believers that certain requirements were important after all and that Gentiles were second-rate Christians by not following the Jewish regulations. It was in fact re-establishing the law and abolishing the gospel.

Peter’s behaviour was contrary to:

- the vision and personal revelation God gave to Peter (Acts 10);
- Peter's usual practice;
- the decisions in Jerusalem (including Peter's, but probably to have been made at a later stage).

Therefore, it was hypocritical (v 13) of Peter and the other Christian Jews who joined him (even Barnabas!). For this reason Paul “opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong” (v 11) and gave his opinion to Peter in public (2:14), reasoning: A Jew living himself like a Gentile, cannot force Gentiles to live like a Jew.

In doing this Paul showed that:

- he did not feel inferior to any of the apostles;
- he did not see Peter (and the other leaders in Jerusalem) as the highest authority in the church of those days;
- he regarded his apostleship and his message not being dependent on the apostles in Jerusalem, although he pointed out the apostles agreed with him.

In the following verses (2:15-21) Paul explained the differences between “faith in Christ” and “observing the law”. It looks like a continuation of Paul’s rebuke of Peter, but at the same time it is an opening statement to his explanation of the gospel to the Galatians in the following chapters.

The main points of his openings argument (in Gal 2:15-21) are profound and passionate.⁷

- V 15-16 “We are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no-one will be justified.”
 - Paul knew all too well that the law does not lead to justification; he had tried hard enough.
 - By seeking Christ’s justification it is evident that we see ourselves as sinners, realising that no-one will be justified by observing the law.” [*i.e. we are not able to keep the law*]
 - In v 15-16, Paul mentions observance of the law three times and justification by faith three times.
- V 17 “If we, while we seek to be justified in Christ, it becomes evident that we ourselves are sinners, does that mean that Christ promotes sin?” **“Absolutely not!”**
 - (Alt:... that Christ is a 'minister of sin'? Or: servant of ...; abettor of ...)
 - Possibly an accusation from these Judaizers.
 - The question could mean that Paul’s position could be open to accusations that the law no longer matters and that therefore standards and morality no longer matter, hence that Christ becomes a *servant* of sin instead of a *servant* of righteousness. However, justification by faith does not result in sin being committed, rather justification is necessary because sin was and is inevitable.
- Paul’s first answer is in V 18 “If I rebuild what I destroyed, I prove that I am a law-breaker.”
 - ‘Destroying’ the law by preaching Christ as the only way to justification.
 - ‘Rebuilding’ or re-establishing the law by expecting Gentiles to observe the law.
 - After all, the law clearly says and proves that I am a transgressor.
 - The best the law can do is proving that I am a law-breaker [*and in need of a Saviour who graciously offers me justification by faith*].
- His second answer is in V 19 “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God.”
 - The law has already killed me, so I am dead to the law **for being alive for God.**
 - Paul knew he had to die to the law before he could live for God.
 - Paul had changed from a law-centred life to a Christ-centred life.
 - After our justification we no longer live for/in sin, but we live to serve God.
- “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, ...”
 - I have already received the death penalty in Christ and now I am dead.
 - [*The law has no longer a hold on me, as I am dead.*]
- “... but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
 - Through my faith in him, Christ now lives in my body.
 - [*The old ‘me’ is dead and the newly created ‘me’ is alive in Christ.*]
 - See 4:19 “... until Christ is formed in you.” (Ampl: moulded)
- “I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be achieved through the law, **Christ died for nothing!- I do not mix legalism with grace; if the law could produce righteousness, Christ died for nothing!**

Further to Paul’s arguments in these verses; let’s remember:

- Ps 142:2 “... no-one living is righteous before you.”
- (also Rom 3:9-12)
- Rom 3:20 “Therefore no-one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of sin.”

⁷ Martin Luther, “This passage contains the sum of all Christian doctrine.”

- Rom 5:20 “The law was added so that the trespass might increase.” (also Gal 3:19)
- Rom 7:11 “... sin ... through the commandment put me to death.”
- Rom 7:12 “The law is holy, righteous and good.”
- Logical conclusion: all are transgressors; no-one is justified in the light of the law.

And:

- Rom 3:21-24 “... through faith in Jesus Christ ... justified freely by his grace ...”
- Gal 3:25 “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law.”
- Rom 7:6 “... by dying to what once bound us, we have been released from the law so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit ...”
- Rom 10:4 “Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes.”
- Jn 1:29 “... the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world.”

Remember also that the way of faith was already opened up before:

- Abraham was not justified by works; his **faith** was credited to him as **righteousness** (Rom 4:1-3; 4:13).
- David was credited with **righteousness apart from works** (Rom 4:6). If not righteous by works, what else made him righteous?
- By faith Able offered a better offer than Cain did. By **faith he was commended as a righteous** man (Heb 11:4). And “... without faith it is impossible to please God ... he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Heb 11:6).

Concluding:

- According to the Bible, God has opened up only one way to righteousness, through faith in Jesus. Also, Christ was already promised in paradise (Gen 3:15).
- By saying that obedience to the law, or parts of it, is still necessary for their righteousness, they thereby say in fact that Christ’s justification is not complete.
- At the same time, the Jewish believers already knew that justification by law is impossible, which leads to the only logical conclusion that neither Christ nor the law is able to fully justify (see 2:18).
- **Therefore, we have to make a choice. Do we want to ...**
 - ... **live in God’s grace** by faith in Jesus Christ and receive justification;
 - ... or live by trying to achieve righteousness by obeying the law in all aspects **and live under condemnation**, because of our inability to do so.
- Muddling the two, law and grace, attacks the heart of the gospel of justification by faith.

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