

Galatians Chapter 2 v 11 - Chapter 3 v 2

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Date: 03 May 2020

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[0 : 00] How important is it to have strong, clear, settled convictions of the truth of the gospel?

Is anyone immune from spiritual fainting in times of testing? The Apostle Paul had himself preached to the Galatian Christians.

In chapter 3 verse 1 he wrote that when he preached to them Christ was clearly portrayed as crucified. In verse 2 he described that the Spirit had come upon them.

Despite this he asked the question in verse 1, who has bewitched you? Despite hearing the Apostle Paul himself, and despite them receiving the Spirit in a powerful way, they had become bewitched.

The very word bewitched suggests a dark, satanic influence. The Galatian Christians had stumbled.

[1 : 11] They had fallen to his attack. They were in a state of confusion. And Paul was perplexed about them. Their experience poses to each of us the question, are you immune from wavering in your faith?

Are you above falling to the devil's schemes? They had the best of starts, and yet they were bewitched. You might have received the gospel from the best preacher in the country, and read the best books, but that does not make you immune from falling under pressure.

Let me remind you of the Apostle Peter. He was taught by the Lord himself. But do you remember what happened to him when a maidservant questioned him as to whether or not it was Jesus' disciple?

Remember what Jesus warned him just a few days earlier. Satan has desired to sift you, Peter. But I've prayed for you that your faith fail not.

The Lord Jesus Christ himself had taught him. Yet out of fear of man, or a maid, he stumbled. Are you better than Peter?

[2 : 41] In verses 11 to 14, Paul spoke to the Galatians about Peter. Years before, Peter had been so bold on the day of Pentecost, when he accused the Jewish crowd of their wickedness.

He boldly blamed them of being involved in the crucifixion of Christ. About 3,000 of them had been convicted and converted through his preaching.

However, Paul described to the Galatians how Peter stumbled again as a result of the fear of man. Look at verse 12. This is what happened to Peter and through Peter, Antioch. For before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the believing Gentiles.

But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles, because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group.

[3 : 48] Perhaps he imagined that James had sent them. His example was followed by others. Look at verse 13.

The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. What was all that about?

Why did Paul introduce Peter in his letter to the Galatians? Essentially, Peter and the Galatian Christians had a lot in common.

They, you and I, have a common faith and a common enemy. Peter knew that Jews and Gentiles were saved by faith in Christ.

He himself had preached the gospel to Gentiles and seen them trust in Christ. Acts chapter 10 and 11 describe how Peter had preached to the Roman centurion Cornelius, Gentile, and those gathered with him.

[5 : 03] The central message of Peter on that occasion was described in Acts chapter 10 verse 42. All the prophets testify about Christ, that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.

All who heard and trusted in Christ were saved then. Peter declared, Peter declared, verse 47, Surely no one can stand in the way of their being baptised with water.

They've received the Holy Spirit just as we have. Chapter 11 and verse 17. He reported to the Christian Jews in Jerusalem.

If God gave them the same gift he gave us who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could stand in God's way? When the believers in Jerusalem heard this, they praised God, saying, So even to the Gentiles God has granted repentance that leads to life.

There was no insistence that they should become circumcised or become a Jew. God had accepted them as they were.

[6 : 29] The Holy Spirit had been given to them. Peter had accepted them. The Christians back in Jerusalem accepted them. They all acknowledged that these Gentiles were as fully children of God as Peter and the Jewish Christians.

Yet here in Galatians chapter 2, verse 12, Out of fear of the circumcision party, Peter had a change of face and became a stumbling block even to Barnabas.

Paul accused him of hypocrisy, of wearing a mask to satisfy men. He'd effectively gone back on his previous conviction that God accepted the Gentiles through their faith in Christ.

Rubbing it in, verse 14, How is it then, Peter, that you forced Gentiles to follow Jewish customs?

I wonder how the Galatian Christians took this as the letter was read to them. Would they see the point that even someone with Peter's authority and stature could waver under pressure and be inconsistent?

[7 : 49] Would they take the point that they too had fallen out of fear of those who seemed to have authority and yet perverted the gospel?

Two important points at least come out of this. Do you realise that if Peter had failed through the fear of man, we can also fall into compromising the faith?

Do you also see that others watch your actions and are badly affected by your example? Are you a stumbling block to others as a consequence of giving credence to the wrong people with the wrong message?

Despite what I've said so far, the most important lesson to learn from the whole incident recorded in chapter 2, verses 11 to 21, is that it's a serious thing to distort the gospel and insist that we should forsake faith in Christ alone and insist that others should follow the traditions of men.

We now come to the central part of the verses we read earlier, the core of the letter and the core of the gospel. Verse 15.

[9 : 14] On whose behalf is Paul speaking when he said we?

He is certainly speaking on behalf of the brothers and sisters with him in chapter 1, verse 1. He is speaking on behalf of Jewish Christians, including a chastened Peter, He is speaking on behalf of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, who had commissioned both of them to preach the gospel to everyone, Peter largely to the Jews, and Paul to the Gentile nations.

We, who are Jews by birth and not sinful Gentiles, know that a person is not justified by works of the law. He emphasised that this is what they knew.

Evangelical gospel-believing Christians all subscribe to this. But Paul said something extra. He injected a statement of his own personal trust in Christ.

He indicated that he and those who stood with him had a personal faith in Christ. So we too have put our faith in Christ, in Christ Jesus, that we might be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the law, because by the works of the law, no one will be justified.

[10 : 54] It's important not only to know the truth, but to live by personal confidence in Christ, who is the truth. You can know the doctrines without actually trusting in the Saviour.

What does it mean to be justified? It's a legal term. It's a thing a judge does when he justifies a person standing in the dock before him.

If he justifies someone accused of a crime, he pronounces them innocent. God has made this pronouncement on everyone, Jew or Gentile, that has trusted in Jesus Christ.

The opposite of justification is condemnation. In his letter to the Romans, Paul argued, Who shall bring any charge against those whom God has chosen?

It is God who justifies. Who is the one who condemns? You realise that if God has justified you, no one in heaven or earth is able to make any charge stick against you.

[12 : 18] Certainly not those who make it clear that they expect certain religious works from you. You mustn't be afraid of their judgments.

You mustn't fear legalists who insist on new conforming to their personal fads or cults, national or international, large or small, that insist on you following them to the letter.

Neither must you feel that you should go through certain hoops to complete everything needed for your justification. God has justified you.

You cannot be more justified than justified. In verse 17, Paul warns those who seek to be justified by faith will be misrepresented and misunderstood.

They'll be classified as being sinners. I tell you that in your seeking to be justified in Christ, some will tell you that you're great sinners or make you feel that you're great sinners.

[13 : 35] Second-class Christians at best. After all, you haven't performed all that they say you must do to be accepted by God. You are outside their clique.

They dismiss you as an outsider, a sinner. Depending on your cultural background, a so-called man of God might accuse you of not having done your religious duty.

You haven't turned up to observe the required rituals or done your works of... ..