

“Standing Firm on the Gospel”

Galatians 2:1-10

Well here we are in our least favourite time of year; no I don't mean the colder, wetter weather, but I am referring to election time. The general rule of thumb by all candidates seems to run down the other guys as much as possible. And any time something comes out about a past statement or activity that the prime minister or candidates have been involved with that isn't popular or culturally correct, they take a beating. This week both Andrew Scheer and Prime Minister Trudeau took a beating over abortion. While Trudeau verbally supports the pro-choice perspective, someone brought up an article from 2011 where he said as a Catholic he was personally against abortion yet didn't believe you could tell anyone what they can or can't do with their bodies. Scheer also took flack this week on The National's 'Face to Face' why he didn't march in Pride parades. The host questioned him by saying 'what's the big deal' as if he was the only one in Canada who wouldn't.

It's not easy when your values or moral views or faith comes under attack and the pressure to 'be like the rest of us normal people' is very real. This is the kind of pressure the Apostle Paul was experiencing in Galatians when he had to defend the truth of the gospel – faith in Jesus alone saves you – from those Jewish traditionalists who insisted that one still had to follow specific Jewish laws in order to be right with God. If the Apostle Paul was asked on The National 'What's the big deal about faith in Jesus alone? What's wrong with people who observe the Sabbath or insist on eating certain foods or being circumcised?' And of course, if that were us being pressured by someone who says 'What's the big deal of faith alone in Jesus? What's wrong with those who say Jesus is fine but so are good works or Muhammed or Buddha? How do we defend our faith when pressures from the culture around us are making it difficult to live for the gospel?

Paul started defending his faith in 1:11 by giving his testimony. Specifically he was showing that the gospel he received came directly from Jesus Himself. It did not come from man, especially from the apostles in Jerusalem because as Paul explained in his first 3 years of being saved he only spent 2 weeks in Jerusalem – hardly enough time to develop a full fledged new belief system.

Paul continues giving his defense here when he begins 2:1 by saying it wasn't until 14 more years (17 years since he was saved on the Damascus road) that he came back to Jerusalem. What brought Paul to Jerusalem was a “revelation” from God. Some have felt that this is Paul's account of the Jerusalem council mentioned in Acts 15. But that came later and not because of a revelation from God. After returning from his first missions' trip with Barnabas (Acts 14), the Judaizers continued to dog Paul and demand that Gentiles who are saved be circumcised (Acts 15:1). So Paul and Barnabas were appointed to go to Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). What then was this revelation from God? Turn to Acts 11:25-30.

²⁵ Then Barnabas went to Tarsus to look for Saul, ²⁶ and when he found him, he brought him to Antioch. So for a whole year Barnabas and Saul met with the church and taught great numbers of people. The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch. ²⁷ During this time some prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. ²⁸ One of them, named Agabus, stood up and through the Spirit predicted that a severe famine would spread over the entire Roman world. (This happened during the reign of Claudius.) ²⁹ The disciples, each according to his ability, decided to provide help for the brothers living in Judea. ³⁰ This they did, sending their gift to the elders by Barnabas and Saul.

Acts 11:25 coincides with Paul's testimony in Gal. 1:21 when Paul went back to his home town and preached the gospel there for those 14 years. That Paul had not returned to Jerusalem was partly due to fear, or possibly different reasons to fear. But that's a good reminder for all of us when challenged to defend the gospel:

Don't Be Afraid When You Need to Stand Firm **(2:1-5)**

It's tempting to skip by the time reference to 14 years going by before Paul returns to Jerusalem. But when you remember the Pharisaic life Paul used to live, this is actually quite staggering and we realize,

It costs to follow Jesus (v.1)

According to the Mosaic Law, every male Jew was to appear in Jerusalem three times a year; Passover, Pentecost and Tabernacles in the fall. Before he was saved Paul would have never missed any of those. But now, as a Christian, Paul no longer felt the need to go to Jerusalem but it must have been hard. Especially when his family would go. Because feast days were family days. The fathers were compelled to go because they are the leaders in the home. A good illustration of this is in 1 Samuel 1 where a man named Elkanah (who has two wives, Peninah and Hannah) obeys the Law and goes to the Tabernacle 'year after year' to sacrifice to the Lord. This is what faithful Jews did. But Paul had accepted Christ. He was no longer bound to the Law. Just because he didn't follow the Law doesn't mean it was easy for him not to go. The pressures from family and friends every time a feast arose must have been hard to endure. To be the guy who wouldn't go because of his faith.

How often do we stay back from some things because of our faith when friends or family attend something that dishonours God or that takes us away from properly worshipping God? It's not easy. It's easier to conform but it's not always the right thing to do. So we withdraw because of our faith. And we hate those conversations about these kinds of issues. Some-times we give in 'for the sake of peace'. But peace at any cost is not peace. Paul held his ground, as hard as it was, and so should we learn to hold our ground when necessary.

When Paul obeyed God to go to Jerusalem (even if he preferred not to go), God affirmed this was of Him. When we choose to obey God rather than succumb to the pressures to conform we can trust God that,

God will show us He is with us (v.2-3)

Paul (probably reluctantly) went to Jerusalem fearing possibly for his life (his wanted poster was probably still hanging in the post office) but he also says he feared when he met the apostles that maybe he had 'run the race in vain'. Paul wasn't doubting the validity of his belief in the gospel of Jesus Christ alone for salvation. Paul was afraid that the apostles may have been pressured by the Jews to follow the Mosaic Law again. So he took Titus, a Greek, with them intentionally to see if they were going to force Titus to be circumcised. But, praise the Lord, the apostles were in agreement with Paul. No way. We're not going back to the Law either. Answered prayer. God showed Paul He was with him and the apostles also.

Because the Judaizers dogged Paul there. He says,

⁴ *This matter [of Titus the Gentile needing to be circumcised to become legitimately saved] arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ*

Jesus and to make us slaves. ⁵ We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you.

Paul stood firm on the truth that faith in Jesus Christ alone saves you. Not Jesus plus circumcision or anything else. Notice where the attack came from. *'False brothers infiltrated our ranks to spy on our freedom.'* How did they sneak in? They pretended they were the real thing. Spying means to observe secretly, lie in wait for. For who or what? Like Satan to look for people who may not be as strong in the faith. People who might be swayed. So they can sow seeds of doubt. Because Paul was

Alert to internal subtle attacks on truth (vv.4-5)

Some of these attacks came from within the church body. People had snuck in purposely to deceive believers and cast doubts in their minds. Cause them to question the gospel and the Bible. Satan doesn't dress in red with a pitchfork and horns on his head. The Bible tells us how he dresses, as an angel of light. Paul had this same battle with the Corinthians. People were calling themselves apostles and preaching a different gospel than Paul. So he wrote in 2 Cor. 11:13,

¹³ For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. ¹⁴ No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. ¹⁵ Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

When Paul commands us in Eph. 6:10-20 to stand firm in the Lord and to take up the armor of God, the attacks of the enemy may come from people closer to us than we think. Let's not be so naïve that we think it couldn't happen here – because some of us know false teachers have tried in the past. They came in, all smiley, friendly. They infiltrated our ranks. They befriended specific individuals and tried to correct our teaching; (using the Bible of course wrongly) to show us where we were wrong. But we stood firm. People have left here because they don't like our gospel, which is the truth of Scripture. We still love them. We still pray for them. But we can't back down from the only message that saves them. Jesus + anything else is not the gospel. Paul said we didn't give in even for an hour and neither did the apostles. And that strengthened Paul's relationship with the apostles because he really only had one from a distance before. And this is what we need to do to help us stay vigilant in opposing false gospels and teachers:

Develop Strong Relationships with Gospel Partners **(2:6-9)**

Paul brought Titus to test the apostles. Had the apostles fallen for this different gospel; Jesus + the Law? No. But they were doing something different than Paul. Yes, but they were partners in the gospel. The apostles' focus was on reaching the Jews for Christ. Paul's focus was on Gentiles. There are many ministries out there in our world who have

The same gospel but serving different people (vv.6-7)

As well as different purposes. Some gospel ministries exist more for evangelism while some exist more for discipleship. Some ministries are specialized strengthening Christian families, Christian singles, Christians who need emotional or physical help. Some ministries share the gospel through humanitarian aid or child sponsorship or camp or sports or pregnancy centers. Praise the Lord! No one church or ministry can do it all. Praise the Lord for the variety of gospel ministries out there. We

need each other. Develop strong relationships with Biblical ministries because we need each other in our battle against the enemy.

We as evangelicals have given ourselves a black eye when we refused fellowship with believers over dress, over music, over Bible translations, over denominations, over church leaders like Spurgeon or Calvin or Wesley or Luther or Menno Simons. Did you know that John Calvin asked that his grave be unmarked so that no one would be tempted to follow him? Yet today we have people who call them selves Calvinists or hyper-Calvinists who won't fellowship with people who don't like that. I'm not even sure John Calvin could be labelled what people call a Calvinist today!

Be alert to the wrong gospel but be strengthened by the diversity of gospel partnerships so we can have a broader perspective on how we reach our world for Jesus. Because,

God works through faithful partners (vv.8-9)

⁸ For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. ⁹ James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews.

God was at work in both because both groups were faithful to the gospel of Jesus Christ and both understood that God in His grace empowers many churches and ministries to make a gospel impact through the various people, passions and resources. They agreed that each should continue to impact the people with whom God by His grace had given them a burden for.

And we also have different passions about different people groups, geographical/cultural locations, and different types of ministries. God works through all faithful partners in the gospel.

Earlier I suggested the context of this section is found in Acts 11:27-30 when the prophet Agabus predicted by the Spirit that a famine would spread over the Roman world. And that the believers everywhere felt compelled to give to the believers in Judea who would be hard hit because they were already being persecuted for their faith, and now food would become scarce. Paul and Barnabas were more than happy to do their part. So we read here in v.10 an affirmation of this which is a good reminder. It's not just enough to believe in the gospel alone for salvation but that we should

Show Our Faith through Acts of Love to Others **(2:10)**

My boss at the grocery store I used to work at in Woodstock had a sign in his office that said, 'People don't carry how much you know until they how much you care.' And that applies especially to the gospel. The reality of our faith in Jesus alone should be evident in how we care for and about people. If Jesus loved everyone and we say we love Jesus but fail to love people, how does that show we really believe in Jesus? Shouldn't our faith in Jesus result in a life like Jesus? This is where Paul's going to continue his letter which we'll see more next week. But for now, Paul's faith in Jesus alone resulted in a burden for not just people's souls but their well-being as well. Why should people care about what we know about the gospel if the gospel we believe in doesn't result in caring about the person?

Paul had the right gospel. He wanted to work with the apostles who also shared the same gospel. He knew Jesus had saved him by grace alone through faith alone. That's the gospel. Nothing added. When Jesus confronted him on the Damascus road He revealed to Paul that Paul was not

righteous in his own good works, which Paul had firmly believed before. Paul thought he was right with God, when in fact He was opposing God by hurting Jesus' followers. When Paul understood that Jesus was the Son of God, he confessed his sinfulness and need for Jesus repenting of his sins and placed his faith in Jesus alone for forgiveness of his sins. If this is what we believe then we too are saved.

Baptism is a crucial part of our growth in Jesus. But it isn't necessary for our salvation. Just ask the thief on the cross. Giving, church membership, serving in a church or ministry are all part of our growth but are not how we're saved. If we're saved then these things will naturally follow but they are not how we're saved. Paul's opponents tried to add works to their salvation. Any time someone adds something to the gospel that says you must be saved by this and Jesus, it's not the gospel and you're not saved.

When we are challenged to state what we believe lets stand firm for what and who we believe. Paul said in Rom. 1:16 don't be ashamed of the gospel for it is the power of God for salvation. People have been misled to believe other 'gospels', other ways to God, but there is only one way. We need to be alert to deceptive gospels and false teachings that are out there undermining the truth. We must not shirk back because the gospel is a big deal. People are lost and don't know they are heading for an eternity of suffering without God. Let's be gracious. Let's show we care by serving others. But let's show people Jesus is a big deal and they need Him if they want to enjoy this life and find joy forever in the next.

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at oliviet@rideau.net