

ACTS 15; GALATIANS 2

BY GRACE, PERIOD.

A PIVOTAL MOMENT

- ▶ A controversy with the potential to divide and derail the work of the Mission
- ▶ A council convening at Jerusalem to decide the foundation and content of the gospel message and its future proclamation
- ▶ A shift of focus from the Church in Jerusalem to the Church in Antioch
- ▶ A shift of personality from the Apostle Peter to the Apostle Paul
- ▶ A development of the paradigm initiated by the Holy Spirit for the execution of the Mission: systematic evangelism in urban centers, the planting of new churches in those localities, and the effective involvement of those churches in the Mission
- ▶ Writing of the first letters that will be contained in the final canon of New Testament scripture

SEQUENCE OF EVENTS—

AD 47

- ▶ Peter comes to Antioch and enjoys “table fellowship” with all, including the Gentiles; this is the extended fulfillment of the vision he received from the Lord at Joppa (*Galatians 2.12*)
- ▶ Believers from the party of the Pharisees come from Judea to Antioch (*representing themselves as from James, the pastor at the church in Jerusalem*); they insist that the Gentiles, in order to be saved, be circumcised according to Jewish religious law (*Acts 15.1*)

AD 48

- ▶ Paul and Barnabas arrive back in Antioch and give their report of how God had “opened a door of faith to the Gentiles” (*Acts 14.26-28*)

AD 48

- ▶ Peter, and then Barnabas, succumb to the pressure of the Judaizers and “draw back” from fellowship with the Gentiles (*Galatians 2.12-13*)
- ▶ Paul publicly confronts Peter for his hypocrisy and misrepresentation of the gospel of grace (*Galatians 2.14-21*)
- ▶ Peter is set straight by Paul and will stand for the gospel of grace at the Council in Jerusalem (*Acts 15.7-11*)
- ▶ With Barnabas corrected and again at his side, Paul contends with the Judaizers (*Acts 15.2*)
- ▶ To settle the dispute, a delegation is chosen to travel to Jerusalem and bring this issue before the apostles and elders (*Acts 15.2*)

AD 48

- ▶ At the same time, this controversy has also infiltrated the churches in Galatia. The report of what is happening gets back to Paul in Antioch, and before traveling to Jerusalem, he writes his letter to the churches in Galatia, recounting what happened at Antioch and rebuking them for frustrating and abandoning the grace of the Lord Jesus (*Galatians 1.6-9*)
- ▶ At the Council in Jerusalem, the believers who belong to the party of the Pharisees demand that the Gentiles be circumcised and required to obey the law of Moses (*Acts 15.5*)
- ▶ Peter, with renewed clarity, recounts how God used him to bring the gospel to the Gentiles and ends his speech by asserting—

“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

UNDERSTANDING THE CONTROVERSY

- ▶ Centuries earlier, God had judged His people for abandoning their covenant obligation and disregarding the Law, resulting in the loss of their status and sovereignty.
- ▶ Learning from their failure, keeping the Law became absolute—the Torah, written and oral, with the commands given through Moses and the rabbinical safeguards developed through the centuries.
- ▶ Zealously adhering to the Torah enabled one to be blameless before God, meriting of His favor and blessing, and entitled to a place in the coming kingdom of God.
- ▶ Lawbreakers endangered not only oneself, but also the nation (cf. John 11.50).
- ▶ Now the Gentiles are turning to God—people who are notoriously immoral, indiscriminate, and injudicious. How can they be a holy people unless they are required to adhere to the Law of Holiness given through Moses?

MERITED FAVOR OR UNMERITED FAVOR

Peter to the Council at Jerusalem—

“Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are.”

—Acts 15.10-11

Paul in his letter to the Galatians—

“We who are Jews by birth and not ‘Gentile sinners’ know that a person is not justified by the works of 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 the works of the law, because by the works of the law no one will be justified.”

—Galatians 2.15-16



If Jesus was condemned to death under the Torah as a transgressor and blasphemer, and if Jesus was actually so righteous in God's sight that God had *already* raised him from the dead (for Jesus would then be the first to enter into the *resurrected* life), then the Torah itself was no longer a reliable guide to what God counted as righteous, nor could it be embraced as something that would reliably make its devotees righteous before God.

The problem for Paul was not that the Torah *could* not be obeyed, but that the Torah was not the final and ultimate revelation of God's righteousness. Jesus was that revelation. A critical effect of his encounter with the risen Lord, then, is that the center of authority and revelation shifts from the Torah to Jesus.

—*David A. deSilva*

OUR HORRIBLE DILEMMA

As the Scriptures say,

“No one is righteous— not even one.

No one is truly wise; no one is seeking God.

All have turned away; all have become useless.

No one does good, not a single one.”

“Their talk is foul, like the stench from an open grave.

Their tongues are filled with lies.”

“Snake venom drips from their lips.”

“Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.”

“They rush to commit murder.

Destruction and misery always follow them.

They don’t know where to find peace.”

“They have no fear of God at all.”

Obviously, the law applies to those to whom it was given, for its purpose is to keep people from having excuses, and to show that the entire world is guilty before God. For no one can ever be made right with God by doing what the law commands.

The law simply shows us how sinful we are.

—Romans 3.11-20

WHAT CAN WE POSSIBLY DO?

- (1) The entire world, including you and me, are guilty before God
- (2) God's Law of Holiness reveals how sinful we are
- (3) It is impossible to achieve merited favor with God through one's efforts of law-keeping.

For the person who keeps all of the laws except one is as guilty as a person who has broken all of God's laws.

—James 2.10

- (4) This is our horrible dilemma and we are left with just one prospect: a declaration of being unrighteous before God and therefore under His judgment and facing the maximum sentence: eternal death
- (5) What can possibly be done? Our dilemma is compounded by the terrible reality that there is nothing we can do to alter our fate—NOTHING!

THE ONLY SOLUTION

But now God has shown us a way to be made right with Him without keeping the requirements of the law, as was promised in the writings of Moses and the prophets long ago. We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes, no matter who we are. For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God freely and graciously declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when He freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood. This sacrifice shows that God was being fair when He held back and did not punish those who sinned in times past, for He was looking ahead and including them in what he would do in this present time. God did this to demonstrate His righteousness, for He himself is fair and just, and He declares sinners to be right in His sight when they believe in Jesus.

—Romans 3.21-26 NLT

HOW CAN WE BE MADE RIGHT WITH GOD?

- (1) All have sinned and fall irremediably short of ever being right with God
- (2) God reveals the only viable solution:
 - ▶ a divine and holy righteousness from God through Jesus Christ
- (3) God presented Jesus Christ as a sacrifice of atonement
 - “propitiation”- a payment to appease wrath and satisfy judgment*
 - ▶ Sin incurs the wrath of God
 - ▶ God, in love for sinful humanity (1 John 4.10; Romans 5.8), presented Christ as a satisfactory payment (propitiation) for the penalty of our sin
 - ▶ God’s wrath is turned from us to Christ
- (4) With the payment paid by Christ, God can then make right (justify; declare righteous and without sin) those whose faith is in Christ and his atoning work

THE WORK OF GRACE

- ▶ Christ, who is infinitely righteous
 - ▶ died as a substitute for who and what we are
 - ▶ helplessly and hopelessly unrighteous
 - ▶ because of our recalcitrant sin
- ▶ By virtue of Christ's substitutionary death
 - ▶ God forgives my sin
 - ▶ and declares my debt paid in full
 - ▶ according to the merit of Christ
- ▶ Thus, by my faith in Jesus Christ
 - ▶ God also declares me justified—
 - ▶ right in His sight—
 - ▶ having His full and infinite favor
 - ▶ and now possessing the the full and infinite merit of my Substitute
- ▶ The responsibility for my sin has been blamed on Christ
 - ▶ the righteousness of Christ has been attributed to me
- ▶ I am justified— and this is **GRACE!**

HOW DO I RESPOND TO AMAZING GRACE?

“But if, in seeking to be justified in Christ, we Jews find ourselves also among the sinners, doesn’t that mean that Christ promotes sin? Absolutely not! If I rebuild what I destroyed, then I really would be a lawbreaker. “For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. I do not set aside the grace of God, for if righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing!”

—Galatians 2.17-21

- (1) Every day, remember the cost inflicted on Christ because of your sinfulness
- (2) Every day, worship the One who died to obtain forgiveness and justification for you
- (3) Every day declare that your life is not your own and that in gratitude you will do anything and go anywhere to share God’s love and grace with other sinners