

# **INTERDEPENDENCE: NEITHER DEPENDENT NOR INDEPENDENT**

## **Galatians 2:1-10**

**It takes a delicate balance of truth with grace and humility with conviction to build a community that reflects the nature of God.**

### **I. GOD'S DIRECTION (VS 1-5)**

*God Wants Us To Learn How To Speak And Act The Truth In Love.*

- A. WE MUST BE HUMBLE (1-2)
- B. WE MUST BE FAITHFUL (3-5)

### **II. GOD'S PLAN (VS 6-9)**

*God Expects Us To Work Together In Harmony To Further His Kingdom.*

- A. OLD HABITS DIE HARD (6)
- B. OVERCOMING OLD HABITS (7-8)
- C. FORMING NEW HABITS (9)

### **III. GOD'S HEART (VS 10)**

*Submitting To God Should Result In A Community That Learns To Depend On One Another.*

- A. FEEDING THE POOR (10a)
- B. BRIDGING THE GAP (10b)

# **Interdependence: Neither Dependent nor Independent**

## **Galatians 2:1-10**

This morning, we are going to continue with Paul's theme of community. In other words, what does it take to build a community that reflects the nature of God? Sometimes churches are derailed because no one is willing to speak the truth. People simply go to church so they can feel good about themselves. They are content to let the leaders do whatever they want, and they just follow along. They expect the church simply to make them feel good and minister to their needs. They are dependent.

On the other hand, churches have split and been destroyed because people wanted to speak the truth as they see it. In other words, they exhibit a spirit of independence. There is no empathy present in these churches. They somehow think they are doing God's will by being divisive.

Building a successful community in Christ takes a lot of humility and a lot of courage. The goal is to become interdependent. We are all required to participate in the community life of the church. It takes courage to speak the truth. But it takes humility to speak the truth in love.

My concern about today's church is that we resemble the peaceful coexistence of lions and lambs at a zoo. Visitors to the zoo were surprised to see the exhibit labeled "Coexistence" containing a lion and some lambs living together. The zookeeper explained that there was nothing to it. He said, "All I have to do every now and then is add a few fresh lambs."

I think that we have to be careful when we read passages like this morning's. It seems that Paul just comes into town with guns blazing. But if we slow down and read carefully, we can see grace at work and God shaping and molding Paul's character.

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I'm going to take a little different view than all of the commentators I have consulted. To be sure, we all agree on the issue of salvation by grace through faith. There is no question about that. To add or subtract anything from the finished work of Christ on the cross is to misunderstand the nature of the Gospel. We all agree on that.

However, I think that God has to continually teach Paul about what it means to live in grace. I think if we read these verses carefully, we can see that Paul seems to be a little hot-headed and God has to constantly rein him in. The main idea of this morning's text is this. It takes a delicate balance of truth with grace and humility with conviction to build a community that reflects that nature of God. I think that even though Paul is justified in using some harsh language, he crosses the line by attacking people who are his allies. We need to keep in mind that grace is all about God and we all need grace.

### **I. GOD'S DIRECTION (VS 1-5)**

#### ***God Wants Us To Learn How To Speak And Act The Truth In Love.***

In verses 1-5 God's direction for Paul is clear. For us, God wants us to learn how to speak and act the truth in love. In other words, if we don't humble ourselves, God will be sure to put us in some very humbling situations.

#### **A. WE MUST BE HUMBLE (1-2)**

And verses 1-2 emphasize the fact that we must be humble. It seems that 14 years after his first visit to Jerusalem, Paul decided to visit Jerusalem again. And this time he took Barnabas and Titus.

Barnabas was famous in the Jerusalem church. He sold an expensive piece of property and gave the money to the early church to feed the poor. Barnabas was the guy who befriended Paul and brought him to meet the disciples. Everybody was suspicious of Paul because before his conversion, he was hunting down Christians, persecuting the church, throwing Christians in jail, and having Christians killed. Barnabas recognized God's work of conversion in Paul. Barnabas brought him into the inner circle and went on missionary journeys with Paul. The name Barnabas means "Son of encouragement."

I want to just point out that even though Barnabas was such a good friend to Paul, Paul argued with him to the point that they split. Even though Paul was a great apostle, he had personality defects just like you and me.

Titus was one of Paul's prodigies. Titus was a Gentile, a non-Jew. He was converted to Christianity through Paul's ministry. Titus becomes a real superstar. Paul sends him to the troubled church at Corinth to bring peace and he sends Titus to Crete to bring some order and peace to that church as well. Titus must be very talented because these were two very difficult peacekeeping missions he was sent on.

Paul's trip to Jerusalem seems to be a noble journey. However, let's look at verse 2. We learn that he went to Jerusalem because he was commanded to go there by God. God directed him to go there by means of a revelation. Whether God spoke directly to Paul or through one of the prophets in the Antioch church like Agabus, we don't know. We know that Agabus predicted a great famine and the church at Antioch took up a collection to help the Jerusalem Christians. We'll talk more about this later. But the important point here is that through a supernatural revelation, God sent Paul to Jerusalem to be accountable to the leaders of the Christian Church in Jerusalem. In other words, Paul had to lay out the message he was preaching to the Gentiles to the other apostles so they could evaluate the message.

Look at the last sentence in verse 2. Paul grudgingly realizes that if the Twelve reject his message, it will be difficult for him to carry on his ministry. If he has their blessing, then it will give credibility to his ministry. The more I read through Paul's letters in the New Testament and through the book of Acts; it seems that it is not in Paul's nature to play nice with others. He was a great Apostle, but I'm not sure if I'd like to work with him.

Paul was directly commissioned by Christ to preach the Gospel message, but Christ was also teaching Paul about the nature of the Christian community. He must learn to fit his ministry into the body. In fact, in his letter to the church in Corinth, Paul describes the church as a body with Christ as the Head. Nevertheless, it seems that as we read through this section, Paul does not seem too happy that God is requiring him to submit to this meeting.

## **B. WE MUST BE FAITHFUL (3-5)**

Let's move on because even though we are required to be humble, we must be faithful to the truth of the Gospel as described in verses 3-5. Now we learn why Paul brought Titus with him. He wanted to present Titus as Exhibit A. Titus was a full-blown non-Jew who came to faith in Christ. Titus was filled with the Holy Spirit, growing in his faith, and ministering to others.

Look at verse 4. It seems that there was a group in the church trying to insist on making all Gentiles Jews before they could become authentic Christians. They wanted the Gentiles to embrace the social, political, and religious nature of Judaism as well as Christianity. Somehow this group infiltrated this private meeting and tried to have Titus circumcised. In other words, they may have said to the Apostles, "Why not have Titus circumcised? He could be a very valuable asset to the Christian community." But Paul points out that he argued against that reasoning because that was the very issue at stake. Did a Gentile convert to Christ have to embrace Judaism as well? In other words, was one saved merely by surrendering to Christ or did they need to embrace Jewish laws as well?

It is hard for us to bring this issue to today because the situation was unique to the early church. Jesus was the Jewish Messiah. Christianity was born as a fulfillment of the Old Testament. All the early Christians were Jews. But the message of salvation that Jesus preached was meant to be offered to the whole world. The basic Gospel message is that because of sin, we are separated from

God. If we believe that Jesus' death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin and if we are willing to submit to Jesus, we are saved. I have seen people make issues about music, dress, even the color of carpet and split churches over them. This is not an argument for truth. This is an argument about ego. Paul refused to let Titus be circumcised because it would negate the message that faith in Christ alone is what saves us.

It takes a great deal of humility and courage to speak the truth in love. However, God wants us to learn how to speak and act the truth in love.

## **II. GOD'S PLAN (VS 6-9)**

### ***God Expects Us To Work Together In Harmony To Further His Kingdom.***

In verses 6-9 we see God's plan laid out. In other words, for us that means that God expects us to work together in harmony to further His kingdom.

#### **A. OLD HABITS DIE HARD (6)**

In verse 6 we can see that old habits die hard. First Paul admitted that God sent him to see and submit to the Apostles in Jerusalem. Now he says, "As for those 'so-called' superstars, they don't mean anything to me. They didn't add anything to my message." Look I know that Paul has to make his point to the church in Galatia, but now he's attacking the people who are going to be his allies. In fact, here is what Paul has to realize. First of all, Jesus is the One Who chose the Apostles and Jesus is the One Who set up Peter, John, and James up as the leaders of the Twelve. Let me just make a side note. The "James" mentioned later on here is not James the brother of John. He has already been martyred by Herod. This James is the half-brother of Jesus. This James is the one who will preside over the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 and the author of the New Testament book of James.

But secondly, Paul better cool it a bit because he doesn't know who he's messing with either. Peter and John are not the coolest heads. Peter cut off a guy's ear in a heat of passion and confusion. John wanted to call down fire from heaven on a city that refused to accept the message of the Gospel. Paul needs their blessing. Paul may be hotheaded and stubborn but so are Peter and John. James seems to be a cooler head. If these three don't mean anything to Paul, then what is he doing there in the first place? Oh yeah, God sent him there. He better calm down a little.

#### **B. OVERCOMING OLD HABITS (7-8)**

Thank God that by this time Peter and John had learned to overcome old habits as described in verses 7-8. The old Peter and John likely would have punched Paul in the face and told him where to take his ministry. They would have met stubbornness and arrogance with more stubbornness and arrogance. They would have turned the whole meeting into a real contest of the wills. However, Peter had been broken the night he failed by denying Christ. He was softened when Jesus restored him to ministry and told him to care for and feed the flock.

John had been softened and broken the day he and his brother approached Jesus and asked them if they could sit down on his right hand and left. In other words, they were vying for the top positions in Jesus' kingdom. When the other apostles got wind of it, an argument broke out in the middle of the road. Jesus publicly rebuked John. It seems that John had then developed a real heart. But history also showed that John had a combative side as well.

But in this case, they were able to hear, understand, and recognize what God was doing through Paul's life and ministry. After all, John and Peter saw the Jews in Jerusalem believe in Christ and receive the Holy Spirit. They traveled to Samaria, laid hands on the Samaritans, and saw them receive the Holy Spirit. God sent Peter to a Gentile's house where he saw Cornelius and his family receive the gift of the Holy Spirit even before Peter was done preaching. Further, Jesus Himself commanded the Apostles to bring the Gospel message to every tongue, tribe, and nation in the whole world. James, John, and Peter understood this.

So when Paul laid out his message and his mission to them, they realized this was God's will. Paul still seems on edge here in verse 8. It seems that this is more of an epiphany to Paul than it was to James, Peter, and John. The same God was empowering all of them to preach the message of Jesus Christ. They all had the same Holy Spirit filling them and filling their converts. There is one Lord, one faith, and one baptism. They were all united in Christ. Primarily they come to realize that God is sending Peter to the Jews and Paul to the Gentiles.

### **C. FORMING NEW HABITS (9)**

And that brings us to verse 9 where we see them developing new habits. It sounds like Paul is perhaps starting to soften and relax a little bit. In all the previous references, he uses Peter's Greek name, *Petros*. Here he uses Peter's Aramaic name, *Cephus*. He recognizes that Peter was appointed by Christ to be the head of the church and that these three are leaders of the Twelve who have been commissioned as the pillars of the church that Christ built. Paul sees that primarily at the beginning, the Apostles are going to try to reach the Jewish community for Christ. Keep in mind that since the captivities, Jews had been scattered all throughout the world. Not only did James, Peter, and John recognize the grace that Jesus bestowed on Paul in saving him and commissioning him to preach the Gospel, Paul recognized the grace Jesus gave to James, Peter, and John in their ministries and the important ministry of maintaining Christian unity throughout the whole church, both Jewish and Gentile.

The meeting ended with James, Peter, and John offering the right hand of fellowship to Paul and Barnabas. This is a pretty loaded phrase. Fellowship is a responsibility to become part of the community. It means that they are going to share in one another's physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being. It means that they are now brothers in Christ. They are now part of the same royal family. They are not human blood relations; they are related through the blood of Jesus Christ. The right hand given in a pledge is the sign of an oath. This handshake is binding. It is the formal acceptance of Paul and his ministry.

Look at the last sentence in verse 9;

*"They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews."*

Actually this was God's plan all along. God specifically chose Paul to preach to the Gentiles of the world. For the most part, Peter, James and John minister in Jerusalem and the surrounding area. However, that doesn't preclude them from ministering to each other's groups. For example, Paul always made a stop at the local synagogues to preach to his fellow Jews. All throughout his life and ministry, Paul never forgot he was a Jew and he had a heart for his people. He wanted to see his fellow Jews saved as well.

Peter seems to have ended up in Rome where he was martyred. Further, even though Peter's letters seem to be addressed to Jewish believers, he is still concerned about the well-being of the church as a whole.

John ends his life in exile on the Island of Patmos. He is the author of the book of Revelation. That book is addressed to the whole church that includes both Jewish and Gentile believers.

James, Peter, John, Barnabas, Titus, and Paul are all concerned about all of humanity coming to faith in Jesus Christ. However, the primary target for Paul will be the Gentiles of the world.

Paul seems to be well prepared for the ministry. He was highly educated and able to argue Greek philosophy and religion.

I think this section has some lessons for us as individuals and for the local church. Sometimes I think we as individuals get involved in a particular ministry and then think that everybody should be actively involved in that ministry. For example, I may be heavily involved in the visitation ministry. That would be fine. However, to insist that everybody in the church be involved in this ministry is to cross a line. If I am heavily involved in the discipleship ministry and expect everybody to be involved in this ministry as well, I have crossed a line. To be sure, we should all be involved in some ministry of the church, but we can't all be involved in all the ministries.

As a local church, we must accept our particular ministry. I have a lot of friends who criticize these mega churches. My feeling is that they do a great job at what they do. For example, Willow Creek reaches people that our church would never reach. We should never be jealous of other churches' ministries. I am happy that people are coming to faith in Jesus Christ. We need to be faithful to what God has given us to do right here.

One of the things we need to learn and always keep in mind is that even though we are free in Christ, that does not mean that we are free to do whatever we want nor does it mean that we are independent. As believers, we are related to and responsible to all Christians throughout the world. We will address our freedom later on in the book of Galatians.

The important point for us to remember is that God expects us to work together in harmony to further His kingdom. The thing that will help us to achieve this is by remembering that we were all saved as a result of God's grace. We were not saved because we were good, moral, smart, or clever. We were saved purely by the grace of God.

Further, whatever ministry we are involved in, we are only allowed to minister, empowered to minister, and commissioned to minister by the grace of God. No person or ministry is more important than any other. The goal is harmony and balance in our individual lives, in the life of our local church, and in the worldwide church.

### **III. GOD'S HEART (VS 10)**

#### ***Submitting To God Should Result In A Community That Learns To Depend On One Another.***

That is emphasized as we get a look at God's heart in verse 10. Submitting to God should result in a community that learns to depend on one another. Again, living free in Christ does not mean living free of responsibility. Being set free in Christ does not mean that we are independent. We are called to live in a community where we are bound together in love.

#### **A. FEEDING THE POOR (10a)**

In the first half of verse 10, we are reminded that God wants us to feed the poor. When I read this, I thought it was very interesting. We have just finished studying through the book of Amos. In that book we saw that God was adamant that we should care for the less fortunate. Now when Paul says that we are not saved or made righteous by keeping the law, that doesn't mean that we throw out the Old Testament and start with Acts chapter 2. God has always said that if we are his children, we will care for the poor. Jesus made it clear that we are to feed and care for the poor.

#### **B. BRIDGING THE GAP (10b)**

If this incident is taking place while Paul is bringing the money the blended church in Antioch collected to help the famine relief in Jerusalem, then we can see how in the second half of verse 10 demonstrates that love bridges the gap. Jews were raised to hate and stay away from Gentiles. Gentiles were taught that Jews were elitists. Socially, culturally, and religiously, they were light years apart.

However, something happened. These people all met the risen Jesus. They were all saved by the same Jesus. They received gifts from the same Holy Spirit. They had all become children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. They were now all part of the same family. I'm sure this was still hard for the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem to swallow. But Gentile Christians were sending money to them so they could eat and survive. It is pretty hard to remain prejudiced against someone when they are saving your life.

It was the same *koinonia*, the same fellowship that united Paul and Peter, now uniting Gentile Christians with Jewish Christians. Here are two churches now involved in one another's lives. Each

one of us has something to contribute to the welfare of our church. We are not to be constantly coming here each week just taking. We are to be contributing in some way. We are not to be detached from the community. We are called to be interdependent. The point of falling in love with God and realizing that it is only by His grace that we live and breathe that we finally come to understand that submitting to God should result in a community that learns to depend on one another.

Learning to live in grace takes humility and courage. We are called to live out our faith in the context of a church community. It takes a delicate balance of truth with grace and humility with conviction to build a community that reflects the nature of God.

Fractured churches are a disgrace to God and a real misunderstanding of what it means to live in grace. Listen to this story by William P. Barker:

*"William P. Barker tells about a small town in Tennessee that had a place of worship with a sign in front that read: 'LEFT FOOT BAPTIST CHURCH.' A student had passed by it many times, chuckled to himself, and wondered about the meaning of the name of the church. Finally, one day, waiting for his bus, the student asked somebody in the town about the significance of the rather unusual name for the church.*

*It seems that a number of years ago, there had been a split in the local congregation, which practiced foot-washing. An argument broke out over which foot should be washed first. And the group insisting on the left foot taking precedence finally withdrew and split off to organize its own church and name its congregation accordingly! 'LEFT FOOT BAPTIST CHURCH.'*

*A division like that might be funny if it weren't so tragic."*

People have split churches over the dumbest things: language, culture, music etc. Yes, we need to stand up for truth but we must do it with humility and with love. We are called to live in a harmonious community of believers with Jesus as our head.