

GALATIANS 1:6 – 2:14

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The opposition that those of "the sect of the Pharisees which believed," carried on against Paul and the true gospel, and the difficulty and confusion that they were able to create, were the stronger and more perplexing because of the encouragement they found in the attitude of the apostles themselves, especially of Peter and James the Lord's brother. We say, "the encouragement *they found*," for no encouragement was really and intentionally *given* by these brethren to the work and course of the Pharisees who believed. Yet, while no encouragement was intentionally *given* by the apostles, nor even by Peter and James the Lord's brother, the temporizing and compromising attitude held by these was such that "the Pharisees which believed" *found* in it encouragement, made a handle of it, and used it to the fullest possible extent in making their efforts effective.

These brethren, in their intended kindness of heart, thought to harmonize the two elements *by* occupying an intermediate position. They did not at once clearly discern the true and all-important issue that was really involved. They did not perceive the difference between Paul's teaching and that of "the Pharisees which believed" was one of *principle*, essential and vital; they therefore thought to find a middle ground upon which—each side, especially Paul, modifying some of their "strong statements," and yielding some of their "extreme positions"—there would be found a harmony. They did at first discern that the two things were *not* so much alike that they gradually shaded into each other and would allow a new one to be formed, or developed from both. They did not perceive that the two were of absolutely antagonistic principles; that they had no kinship to any extent whatever; and that therefore the only true course must be the utter abandonment of the old and the complete espousal of the new.

As Peter and James are both involved in the matter of the letter to the Galatians, and at least incidentally in the events that called it forth, it is essential to an intelligent study and understanding on the book of Galatians that this phase of the subject should be understood.

All know that as late as several years after Pentecost it required a special vision, and that the substance of the vision should be *three times* shown, to break down traditionalism in the mind of Peter, and to open his eyes to the divine truth that God is no respecter of persons. Acts 10. And that this was the object and the necessity of the vision, is made certain by the words of Peter himself, speaking directly on that subject. For when, in obedience to the word of the Lord, he had gone to the house of Cornelius and begun to speak to the "many that were come together" there, the very first words that he said were these: "Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; *but God hath showed me* that I should not call any man common or unclean." Acts 10:28. The Interlinear Greek, the word-for-word translation, gives Peter's words thus: "Ye know how unlawful it is for a man, a Jew, to unite himself, or come near, to one of another race." Not simply, ye know that it is an unlawful thing; but, "Ye know *how* lawful it is."

But the truth is that it never was an unlawful thing at all, except by their pharisaic inventions and traditionalism. Those pharisaic inventions and tradition, and that traditionalism, were never entitled to any recognition whatever as law or obligation. And so far as they were so recognized, their only effect was to make void the whole word and Spirit of God both in the law and in the gospel of God. How unlawful it really was, however, by that Pharisaic ceremonialism, is worth stating here, and is seen in this piece of teaching of the rabbis: "He who eats with an uncircumcised person, eats, as it were, with a dog; he who touches him, touches, as it were, a dead body; and he who bathes in the same place with him, bathes, as it were, with a leper."— "*Farrar's Life and Work of Paul*," chap. 15, note to par. 4 from end.

In view of this, how expressive is the statement that when Cornelius fell down at his feet, and worshiped him "Peter *took* him up ... and as he talked with him, he went in;" showing that Peter both touched him and walked and talked familiarly with him as with a brother. And the explanation of it all was that "God hath showed me that I should not call any man common or unclean." In truth, *God* had never showed anything else: it was only the traditionalism and ceremonialism of pharisaism that had ever showed otherwise.

But that was not the last of it. "The apostles and brethren that were in Judea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God." And not only this, but the news reached there of the awful thing that Peter had done in associating with Gentiles. "And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, *they that were of the circumcision* CONTENDED with him, saying, *Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, AND DIDST EAT WITH THEM.*" That the word of God's salvation had been preached to lost men, and that *they had received it* was nothing, yea, was worse than nothing, in presence of the awful fact that a Christian should have associated with men uncircumcised, and had even eaten with them! "But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it in order unto them;" and after giving the full account, he appealed to themselves: "Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as He did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; What was I, that I should withstand God?" And "when they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life." Acts 11:1-18.

Yet, though for that particular occasion they acknowledged the truth and the propriety of Peter's course, they did not hold fast to the truth. For when the gospel began to spread among the Gentiles, it was some of these men of Judea who went to Antioch and "taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye can not be saved." Acts 15:1. The controversy thus urged by the Pharisees who believed caused the council at Jerusalem. In the council, Peter stood firmly and openly for the truth, as he had been instructed in the vision and by the Holy Spirit, and as he had stood when called to account by those at Jerusalem. He said the same thing now as before. Acts 15:7-11. The council decided the same way, and published to all the churches their decision accordingly.

Yet after all this, still the Pharisaic ones nursed their traditionalism and ceremonialism, and soon began again to urge it, especially against Paul. However, when, after the council, Peter went to Antioch, he still stood firmly and openly in the truth, and "did eat with the Gentiles." But presently "certain came from James" and from Jerusalem, and so strongly urged their traditionalism and ceremonialism that Peter actually abandoned his instruction in the vision; surrendered his firm and consistent stand at Jerusalem when called to account, and when in the council; and forsook brotherhood with the Christians who were from the Gentiles—the uncircumcised. Gal. 2:12.

This was caused, says the record, by "certain which came," not from Judea nor from Jerusalem alone, but "*from James.*" This shows that before reaching Peter they had affected James; and then, coming from James, had used the prestige of James to affect Peter and to draw him away. James, too, had stood firmly and openly for the truth in the council. It was his sentence that had settled the question in the council. The very words of his decision were adopted by the council, and were published as the decision of the council. And yet even him the pharisaic traditionalists and ceremonialists "which believed" had succeeded in dragging back from the truth.

The real position of James at this time, and indeed to a much later time, is shown in the record of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem—his last visit just because of this attitude of James: even long after the letter to the Galatians was written. The account is in Acts 21:18-26. This visit was made especially to win the brethren in Jerusalem. Paul and his company arrived at Jerusalem, and the brethren received them gladly. "And the day following Paul went in with us *unto James*; and all the elders were present." This shows that James was the chief one who was the object of the visit. Though all the elders were present, yet Paul and his companions "went in ... unto James."

And what did they meet there? When Paul "had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him—*what, think ye?*"—They begin at once to try to drag even him away from the truth of the gospel to a compromise on traditionalism and ceremonialism.

"Instead of doing justice to the one whom they had injured, they still appeared to hold him responsible for the existing prejudice, as if he had given them cause for such feelings. They did not noble stand in his defense, and endeavor to show the disaffected party their error; but they threw the burden wholly upon Paul, counseling him to pursue a course for the removal of all misapprehension." — *Sketches from the Life of Paul*, pages 211, 212. And this even from James, who had stood so straight and true in the council, and who, after hearing from Paul a full statement of the gospel that he preached, could add nothing to it, and therefore had given him his right hand in fellowship!

They said unto him, "Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous for the law: and they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs. What is it therefore? The multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come. *Do therefore this* that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; them take, and *purify thyself with them*, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and *all may know* that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, *are nothing*; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only," etc., etc.

"The brethren hoped that by this act Paul might give a decisive contradiction of the false reports concerning him. But while James assured Paul that the decision of the former council (Acts 1:15) concerning the Gentile converts and the ceremonial law still held good, the advice given was not consistent with that decision which had also been sanctioned by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God did not prompt this advice. It was the fruit of cowardice." — *Ibid.*, page 212.

These facts throw a strong light upon the expression that when "certain came from James," Peter withdrew from the Gentiles and "separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision." This also gives a better idea of the powerful influence that was exerted to draw Peter back from the truth—the influence which was indeed so powerful that even "Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation."

But Paul knew the gospel that he was sent to preach. He knew that it was the truth. And though thus left to stand alone against, to him, the most powerful human influence in the world, he cared not for this. "But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jew, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law: for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified."

Both Peter and James did finally come to clear faith; but it took time for them to do it: and while they were coming to it, their course had no little influence in creating the condition that called forth the letter to the Galatians.