

Who Has Authority?*Galatians 1:-2:20*

Introduction: In the book of Galatians Paul is addressing a situation in which some Christians from Jerusalem had come to the Galatians teaching that if you really want to please God, you must keep the OT law. Even though these teachers believed in Jesus, they couldn't imagine that the Law was no longer in effect. They honestly thought that it was best for the Galatians to begin observing the Law. In Galatians 1 and 2 Paul argues that these Christians simply didn't have the authority to impose their brand of Christianity on anybody else. In one sense today's passage is all about Paul: Paul's motivation and his independence from Jerusalem. But this passage isn't merely a history lesson. This passage makes clear that nobody has the authority to impose their brand of Christianity on others in any generation. Nobody has the authority to revise, edit, or supplement the gospel of grace.

Read Galatians 1:10-2:10

1. What seems to be the point of verse 1:10 in context of Paul's over-all discussion?
2. What does Paul say about how he received the gospel (1:11-12)?
3. What arguments does Paul use to support the point that his gospel was not under the authority of the Jerusalem church or its leaders?
4. What had the leadership in Jerusalem said earlier about Paul's gospel (2:1-10)?
5. Why is it important for Paul to establish the independent nature of his ministry?

Steve said:

Sometimes we may be tempted to say, "That's too vague. Keeping in step with the Spirit takes too much effort. Just give me a list of do's and don'ts so that I know if I'm pleasing to God." Sometimes we don't want to deal with God. We want a system that works. But God wants us to have a grown-up relationship with Him. We rightly give small children a list of rules because they don't yet know right from wrong; they don't know what's dangerous and what's safe. But there's something wrong if have to tell your 25-year-old son, "Don't touch the stove or you'll burn yourself. Look both ways before crossing the street. . ." God wants a grown-up relationship with us whereby we think the way He thinks and whereby we want the things He wants. He wants to guide us into this maturity through His Holy Spirit who indwells us.

6. Why is a grown-up relationship with God better than a relationship of do's and don'ts?

7. Why do we sometimes prefer a system of rules (even good rules) as opposed to walking in the Spirit?

Steve said:

The truth that ***nobody has the authority to impose their brand of Christianity on other believers doesn't mean you shouldn't have convictions*** about issues not specifically addressed in the Bible. For example, the Bible doesn't tell you how much TV you can watch; it doesn't tell you whether you can watch R-rated movies; it doesn't tell you whether or not you can subscribe to People magazine. That doesn't mean you shouldn't have convictions about your intake of entertainment media. Just because Faith E Free isn't going to make a bunch of rules about these things, doesn't mean that it's fine to consume anything you want. The Scriptures say things like, "Whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely. . . let your mind dwell on these things. . ." (Phil 4:8). We need to live in light of such Scriptures. Actually we need to allow the Holy Spirit Himself to lead us in regard to our intake of entertainment media. The Holy Spirit can do a much better job than Faith E Free when it comes to this area of your life.

8. What kinds of thing are you tempted to want all "good" Christians to do?
9. Do you find it hard to hold convictions without imposing them on others? Explain.

Steve said:

The truth that ***nobody has the authority to impose their brand of Christianity on other believers . . . doesn't mean that it's wrong for a believer, a church, a denomination, a ministry, or a family to have distinctives***. Every church, for example, has all sorts of distinctives that go beyond what's taught in the Bible. Here at Faith . . . we celebrate the Lord's Table on the first Sunday of the month. Some churches have the Lord's Table every single week. Both types of churches have good reasons for their practice. It's absolutely fine to have such distinctives. A church crosses a line, I think, when it says, "Unless you observe the Lord's Table like us, you're really not honoring God." . . . There's a sense in which every believer, every church and every family practices a certain "brand" of Christianity. There's not one single unified way to live out a relationship with Jesus Christ. By God's design there's not a single expression of biblical Christianity that transcends cultures and generations and personalities.

10. What tensions are there with this approach when we don't demand that all Christians live out their Christianity in the same way?