

Galatians 2:6-10

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/gal/gal-2/galatians-26-10/>

The apostles and elders in Jerusalem affirmed Paul's teaching of the gospel of grace. God was working through all of them; those in Jerusalem preached to the Jews, while Paul and his team preached to the Gentiles. There was agreement that Jews would continue to follow Jewish religious practice, but the Gentiles would be free of such practice.

Paul continues his recounting of the Council at Jerusalem, referencing *those who were of high reputation*, but making it clear that he personally does not care about hierarchy among men, because *God shows no partiality*. Those of high reputation before men, the Jerusalem elders and apostles, included James, the half-brother of Jesus, who was the head elder of the Jerusalem church, and likely the author of the book of James. It also included Jesus' apostles: Peter and John. There are no higher names in Christianity, but in spite of their lofty station, these important leaders *contributed nothing* to Paul. They did not instruct him or correct his gospel. Paul's gospel, which he received directly from Jesus, was confirmed completely.

After explaining his teaching to the Jerusalem Elders (Galatians 2:2), they had nothing to add to what Paul said. They were in agreement. Acts was written by Luke, who was an ally and ministry partner of Paul. Part of Luke's motivation to write the gospel of Luke and book of Acts might have been to help support Paul's authority as an apostle, and his authority in the gospel.

Luke recounts the statement of Peter at the Jerusalem council that completely affirms Paul's gospel of grace: "After there had been much debate, Peter stood up and said to them, 'Brethren, you know that in the early days God made a choice among you that by my mouth the Gentiles would hear the word of the gospel and believe. And God, who knows the heart, testified to them giving them the Holy Spirit, just as He also did to us; and He made no distinction between us and them, cleansing their hearts by faith. Now therefore why do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear? But we believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, in the same way as they also are'" (Acts 15:7-11).

In this statement to the Jerusalem council, Peter affirms Paul's assertion that the Jewish religious rules have no benefit in salvation. Their hearts were cleansed by faith, and both Jews and Gentiles are "saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus." Further, God made it clear that He had cleansed their hearts by giving them the Holy Spirit without any circumcision or rule-following. "Placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear" refers to the reality that the Jewish rules didn't work anyway. So to insist the Gentiles also follow these rules, which didn't work, was to "put God to the test."

The Jerusalem authorities did not side with Paul's opponents in Antioch. *On the contrary*, the Jerusalem elders rightly saw that Paul had been *entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised*. Paul had operated in his ministry independent of these men. James was the half-brother of Jesus (1:19); Peter served closely with Jesus during His ministry, and was foundational in the growth

of His church (Matthew 16:18); John was the disciple whom Jesus loved, the author of the gospel of John (John 21:24). These men knew Jesus intimately, and had served and suffered alongside Him.

Paul, however, came to faith in Jesus after He had returned to Heaven. Paul was confronted by an appearance of Jesus on the road to Damascus (1:16). Paul had only known Peter (also called Cephas) and James for a couple of weeks after his conversion (1:18-19), before spending fourteen years apart from them, preaching the gospel that he received from Jesus. And yet, despite these divisions of time and space, there was unity at the Jerusalem council with respect to the gospel, at least for now. But that unity was not to last long.

The apostles and those at the Jerusalem council were in agreement that Paul's mission from God was to *go to the Gentiles* to preach about Jesus to the uncircumcised, the Gentiles. The apostles *recognized the grace that had been given* to Paul. This was a man through whom God was working to bring salvation to the Gentiles. The gospel had been given to him directly from Jesus (1:12).

So, *James and Cephas and John, the pillars* and leaders of the Jerusalem church, gave Paul and his companions *the right hand of fellowship*. At this point, these men were of the same accord, teaching the same gospel, defending faith alone in Jesus and His grace, dismissing the idea that Gentiles needed to follow the law or become circumcised to be saved. The Jerusalem apostles endorsed Paul's mission work toward non-Jewish peoples, and remained committed to teaching the gospel to Jews: *we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised*.

The only thing the apostles asked Paul to do was to *remember the poor*, which was already on Paul's mind, *the very thing* he was *eager* to do. We see this in Acts 11, where a believer named Agabus accurately prophesies a famine, so that the Gentile believers in Antioch raise money to send to Jewish Christians for relief, by way of Paul and Barnabas: "So the disciples determined, every one according to his ability, to send relief to the brothers living in Judea. And they did so, sending it to the elders by the hand of Barnabas and Saul" (Acts 11:29-30).

However, the unity of the Jerusalem council did not appear to last for long. We are not told how it came unraveled, but one can imagine that the Pharisees who lost the argument at the Jerusalem council went to work to undermine the decision that had been reached. And they must have been quite persuasive, because not much time appeared to have passed until the Apostle Peter came to visit Antioch, where Paul was preaching, and Paul had to confront Peter for not being true to the words he had spoken at the Jerusalem council.

Biblical Text

⁶ But from those who were of high reputation (what they were makes no difference to me; God shows no partiality)—well, those who were of reputation contributed nothing to me. ⁷ But on the contrary, seeing that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised, just as Peter had been to the circumcised ⁸ (for He who effectually worked for Peter in his apostleship to the circumcised effectually worked for me also to the Gentiles), ⁹ and recognizing the grace that had been given to me, James and Cephas and John, who were

reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, so that we might go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.¹⁰ They only asked us to remember the poor—the very thing I also was eager to do.