

Three Proofs Of Paul's Apostleship

In Galatians two Paul presents unassailable arguments that his apostleship was from God and he was equal to the original twelve in knowledge, power and authority.

The events of this chapter correspond to those recorded in Acts fifteen. Statements made by the apostle in Galatians two help fashion a timetable from Paul's conversion to his ultimate journey to Rome. He mentions "*fourteen years*" which stretched between his departure from Jerusalem (recorded in Acts 9) and his return with Barnabas from their first journey, recorded in Acts 13-14. Paul omits the Judaizing teachers coming to Antioch and troubling the church there, causing brethren to urge him and Barnabas to carry the issues to Jerusalem for a settlement of the problem (Acts 15). Paul adds one important footnote; he "*went up by revelation*" (Gal. 2:2). The conference was a vindicating victory for churches that the freedom God gave from the law was sustained. The Judaizing party which sought to bind circumcision and the law suffered a crushing defeat. The decision reached in Jerusalem and the attitude toward Paul by earlier apostles present formidable evidence for Paul's claim of equality among those apostles. This evidence is presented in three different arguments.

First, Paul argues that although he had received his knowledge from no man, it agreed perfectly with earlier teaching of the twelve. He wrote, "*... I laid before them the gospel which I preach among the Gentiles but privately before them who were of repute, lest by any means I should be running or had run in vain*" (Gal. 2:2). Two important truths resulted from this disclosure. He said, "*But not even Titus who was a Greek was compelled to be circumcised ...*" (Gal. 2:3). Circumcision was the "litmus test"! If Gentiles were to be compelled to be circumcised, then the keeping of the whole law was bound upon them. If Gentiles were not compelled to be circumcised, then they were free from the law. What Paul wrote here was in perfect harmony with Luke's account of that meeting. Both Peter and James "scratched" the necessity of circumcision, Peter calling it a "*yoke*;" James referring to it as an "*unnecessarily troubling*" of the Gentiles (Acts 15:10, 19f). Paul further wrote that "*... from those who were reputed to be somewhat (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepted not man's person) - they, I say, who were of repute imparted nothing to me ...*" (Gal. 2:6). In essence, earlier apostles could neither add to nor diminish from Paul's message. They were in agreement that what he taught was truth, even about circumcision and the keeping of the law!

Second, Paul wrote, "*but contrawise, when they say that I had been intrusted with the gospel of the uncircumcision ... when they perceived the grace that was given unto me, James and Cephas and John, they who were reputed to be pillars, gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, that we should go unto the Gentiles ...*" (Gal. 2:9). Thus, if Peter, John and James gave to Paul and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship, they endorsed what Paul and Barnabas taught! And, by necessary implication, they did not endorse those who urged circumcision and keeping of the law upon Gentiles. The letter earlier sent out by the apostles and elders in Jerusalem made this clear. "*Forasmuch as we have heard that certain who went out from us have troubled you with words subverting your souls: to whom we gave no commandment*" (Acts 15:24).

Finally, Paul spoke of an unhappy incident which happened in Antioch after the events of Jerusalem in Acts 15. Peter came to Antioch "*before that certain came from James, he ate with the Gentiles; but when they came, he drew back and separated himself, fearing them that were of the circumcision*" (Gal. 2:12). Peter's actions had a "domino effect" upon other Jews there: the rest of the Jews and Barnabas as well, withdrew themselves also from association with believing Gentiles (Gal. 2:13). This was hypocrisy and contrary to the gospel. So Paul "*resisted him (Peter) to his face, because he stood condemned*" (Gal. 2:11). The implication is clear. Had Peter been superior to Paul, Paul would have been "out of order" to have rebuked him in the public fashion he did. The fact that he rebuke Peter "*before them all*" showed Paul to be on a par with the twelve, teaching the same gospel as they. He said to Peter, "*If thou being a Jew, livest as do the Gentiles, how compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?*" (Gal. 2:14). Good question!

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