

Chapter 5

DO I NOW PERSUADE MEN OR GOD?

For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. (Galatians 1:10-12)

Paul began reestablishing his apostolic authority with the churches of Galatia in the first verse of his letter and continued through chapter two, because the Judaizers had challenged his authority when they preached their *other gospel* to the Galatians. Consequently throughout his letter to them, Paul's primary focus was upon differentiating between the fundamentals of the grace of God and the legalism of the Judaizers. However these differences were enmeshed in Saul, who had become the apostle Paul. Thus Paul's authority as an apostle was so closely linked with the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ, the defense of the gospel and the defense of Paul's authority became one issue.

It was for this reason Paul questioned, *For do I now persuade men, or God?* This seems an odd question, even though Paul's ministry entailed persuading those to whom he preached with

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

the truth of the gospel. With them, it was possible to see their minds changed by the preaching of the Word of God and the ministry of the Spirit of God, but with an immutable God it was not, and is not, possible to effect a change of mind. Even though we find anthropomorphic expressions of God's mind being changed throughout the Scriptures, as just stated, God is immutable. Despite these expressions, in reality God's mind cannot be changed because of the very nature of His being. It does not make Scriptural sense, then, for Paul to have questioned the Galatians about persuading God, since God cannot be persuaded.

Consequently Paul's question requires further investigation to discover what he actually meant when he asked, *Do I now persuade men, or God?* We find the answer in the meaning of the word *peitho*, translated *persuade* in this text. There is no question that *peitho* can mean *to persuade*, but it can also be used in a variety of ways. Thus the specific meaning for *peitho*, like so many English words, is dependent upon the context in which it is found. *Peitho* is the root word in the New Testament from which the word faith is derived; so it not only means *to persuade*, it also means *to be persuaded*. It is this latter meaning that more accurately fits the context of Paul's argument.

In the light of this, then, Paul's actual question of the Galatians was, *For is my persuasion now of men, or of God?* This translation fits the context of Paul's argument to the Galatians as well as agreeing with the immutability and omniscience of God. This meaning of the word *peitho* proves to be the correct meaning for this text, because Paul went on to say, *or do I seek to please men? For if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.* Our Lord said *No man can serve two masters* and Paul, in his argument to the Galatians, essentially said, *You cannot please*

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

God and man. If the man of God is to be faithful to the truth of the Word of God, he must not think according to the manner of thinking of the conglomerate of men who make up this world's system and *its ways, which are not God's ways.*

To think according to this world's system is an easy trap to fall into. This is the way we always thought until, through the preaching of the Word of God and quickening power of the Spirit of God, our minds were changed. It is this change of mind that the Bible calls repentance. (Note: Repentance unto salvation was brought about when the Spirit of God caused us to realize that we could not present ourselves to God by the works of our own hands. We realized ourselves to be sinners and threw ourselves upon the grace and mercy of God in Jesus Christ. However our minds continue to be changed as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ through the operation of the Word and Spirit of God.) Thus our minds were changed to think according to the Word of God and not according to the world's system, which manifests itself in the doctrines and commandments of men, such as *touch not, taste not, handle not* to formulate a right relationship with God. It is not surprising that the Galatians were able to be confused by the precepts of the world, preached by the Judaizers, even though their precepts contradicted all that Paul had preached to them. It is for this reason that Paul wrote, *Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh*, and John wrote:

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever. (I John 2:15-17)

As we have seen in the previous chapter, the thinking of the world's system is according

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

to the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. It is according to the lie of the Devil, with which he deceived Eve. Consequently the man of God, as well as the children of God, need a metamorphosis of the mind. This metamorphosis is available to every believer in Jesus Christ when he begins to think according to a rightly divided Word of God, by the quickening power of the Spirit of God. It is in this regard that Paul wrote the Romans:

And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God. (Romans 12:2)

In this text *transformed* is a translation of the Greek word from which we derive our word *metamorphosis*. In the biological world this word is used to describe the transformation of a caterpillar into a butterfly. This is quite a remarkable change and so is the change of a believer -- who sees himself to have been crucified; to have been buried; and to have been raised from the dead with Christ in the judicial reckoning of God -- *to walk in newness of life*. This new manner of living is not according to ritual and law as the Judaizers erroneously told the Galatians, but is a life of faith predicated of the Word of God.

The world's system thinks in terms of ritual and law, but the *newness of life* is a life of trust. The source of that trust is the promises of God contained in the Word of God and is brought to the believer's mind *by hearing the Word of God*. The prophet Habakkuk testified to this life, and so did the apostle Paul (in Romans and Galatians), as well as the writer of the book of Hebrews. *The newness of life*, expressed by Paul to the Galatians, is *The just shall live by faith and law is not of faith*. Thus the *newness of life* is living according to the persuasion of God and not according to the persuasion of men.

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

Paul's former life as Saul of Tarsus was a life of living according to the persuasion of men. This is revealed to us in his next statement to the Galatians -- *for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ*. The use of the word *yet* signifies the continuance of a former practice. Thus we know that Saul of Tarsus had been a man-pleaser. It is not likely that Saul could have risen to the position to which he had risen in Judaism without practicing the duplicity of pleasing men, but such a practice has no place in the service of God. Paul expressed this to the Galatians by stating that if he were still practicing his man-pleasing ways, he could not be the servant of Christ. From this point in his letter, Paul began to contrast his former manner of life and thinking with his present manner of life and thinking and the source of the change, so he wrote:

But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ. For ye have heard of my [manner of life] in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it: and profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the [Gentiles]; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: but they had heard only, that he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me. (Galatians 1:11-24)

With these words, Paul stripped the Judaizers of the basis of their attack on his person and his authority. It is ironic that their attack on Paul actually gave him the perfect strategy to defeat them and make a defense for the saving grace of Jesus Christ. This is true because there was nothing about Saul of Tarsus that merited salvation. In fact, he is a perfect example of the need

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

of salvation by those who are steeped in religion, but do not have their faith in Christ. Saul had been zealous for his religion, but his religion did not and could not make him right before God. Paul revealed that there was a time in his life when the traditions of the fathers and his position in Judaism had been more important to him than a clear understanding of the Word of God. He had been born to privilege in Israel, and he had used his wealth and privilege to provide him with education, opportunity and position as he climbed the ecclesiastical ladder. Those who would make such a climb required ambition, drive and a sometimes ruthless sense of purpose. Despite his many talents, Saul had resorted to the age old practice of manipulation through man-pleasing. These things had been a part of his life. They could not be denied. Even so the Judaizers had resorted to another age-old practice -- the use of innuendo and half truths to promote their lie. As we have seen, Paul countered their distortions by testifying, *If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Jesus Christ.*

Paul was greatly altered by the grace of God which had been extended to him. From our previous studies as well as from our text, we know Paul testified to the fact that the Lord had given him his gospel by the direct revelation and teaching of the Lord Jesus during the three years Paul spent with Him in Arabia. Paul was also given special insight into the grace of God; the purpose of God in the church age; the cutting off of the nation of Israel and the grafting in of the Gentiles; and many other mysteries. By the grace of God the apostle Paul was equipped in a marvelous way to be a faithful steward of these mysteries.

One of these mysteries portrays mankind as having been sold into slavery, just as Israel was sold into Egyptian bondage. This slavery was the result of Eve's deception and Adam's wilful

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

sin and is seen in the use of the Greek word *ekagoradzo* for *redemption* in the New Testament. This word portrays the believer as having been purchased out of the slave market of the sin of Adam by the Lord Jesus Christ. In the analogy of this mystery, all of us who are redeemed once stood in the slave market of the sin of Adam, naked and undone. We stood there stripped of all pretenses at righteousness, without dignity, and in the shame of all of our sins until the Lord bought us with His blood and removed us from the slave block.

For this reason Paul counted himself to be a bond servant of Christ. This is the reason he could no longer serve himself. This is the reason he dedicated himself to the service of the Lord Jesus Christ and forsook his man-pleasing ways. This is the reason the prestige and power which had come to Paul, when he was religious and lost, paled beside his new position in Christ. This was the reason for the complete change in his motivation. He could never forget that he had been a persecutor, a blasphemer, and injurious to the cause of Christ. By his personal experience, as well as by the revelation of God, Paul knew without question that salvation could only be by grace. It goes without saying, then, the grace that was bestowed upon Paul was, and is, the only means by which anyone can be accepted of God.

In contrast to Paul, the Judaizers boasted of their special relationship with God based upon their efforts at law-keeping. Their self-evaluation gave them a sense of well being and accomplishment. This error persisted throughout that age and it continues to persist in this age. Thus late in his ministry, from a prison in Rome, Paul was still fighting the error of the Judaizers. Its effects were still being felt in all of the churches. So Paul wrote to the Philippians:

Beware of dogs [Gentiles], beware of evil workers, beware of the concision. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

have no confidence in the flesh. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more: circumcised the eighth day of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ, and be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith. (Philippians 3:2-9)

Everything Saul had gained as a man-pleaser in the ranks of Judaism -- the prestige, the power, the position, the approval of man -- was nothing compared to salvation by grace. Saul certainly had a notable career in Jewry, but how did it compare to the faith of Christ? The answer to this question has come to us from a prison in Rome, where, at the end of his ministry, Paul would face a Roman axe and have his head severed from his body. It is from this perspective, then (of a man facing judgment and death), that Paul tells us: *But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ. Yea doubtless, ... and do count them but dung.*

Paul was amazed that the Galatians had fallen for the blatant denial of the grace of God and for the works of man. Even so Paul knew human nature. He knew how strong those inner feelings of morality and pride had been in himself. He knew their effects on the Galatians. Paul was not opposed to proper conduct, nor are we, but adding the necessity of law keeping and ritual to the gospel of the grace of God perverts the very nature of God's grace.

Paul staunchly defended the grace of God and revealed his motivation for his stand to the churches of Galatia in contrast to the Judaizers' motivation. With salvation, Paul had become a servant of Jesus Christ. He had nothing to gain personally by the proclamation of the grace of

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

God. He had served himself in the past, but with his salvation he had become the bond servant of the One Who had redeemed him. Paul's life, then, both past and present, was a testimony to the grace of God. Therefore he wrote:

But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood: neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter.... (Galatians 1:15-18)

In this section of his epistle to the Galatians, Paul testified to the sovereignty of God in a five fold-way. First, God's sovereign power was set in order in Saul's birth. God is the Designer of heaven and earth. The universe is held in place and operates according to God's sovereign will, expressed in the specific designs of all of creation. Thus all life forms reproduce after their own kind and operate according to their God-given design. This fact made it perfectly proper for Paul to say it was *God, who separated me from my mother's womb....* Second, God called Saul by His grace. This, too, was an act of God's sovereign will and power. In fact, this manifestation of God's sovereignty transcended all of the fleshly efforts of Saul to destroy the church. God's sovereignty prevailed when everything in Saul's own power was contrary to the will of God and on a course of self-destruction away from the truth of God. Third, God's sovereign grace was revealed in Saul. God chose Saul of Tarsus, the avowed enemy of the gospel, to be the apostle Paul -- the dedicated servant of the gospel of Jesus Christ and defender of the faith. Thus Paul was chosen to be the apostle to the Gentiles, as Peter and the other apostles were chosen to be the apostles to the Jews. Fourth, God gave the gospel of the saving grace of Jesus Christ to Paul by sovereign decree and direct revelation. Thus Paul was able to say: *But I certify you brethren, that*

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

the gospel which was preached of me is not after man. For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ (Galatians 1:11-12).

This does not suggest Saul was saved some other way than by the preaching of the gospel. It simply means the gospel Paul preached did not have its source in man, neither was he taught the precepts of the gospel by man. Saul was certainly saved, as all men are saved, *By the foolishness of preaching*; but his understanding came by the direct revelation of Jesus Christ. Fifth, Paul was given understanding of the gospel of grace by sovereign decree. Consequently Paul had understanding beyond the understanding of the church in Jerusalem and the other apostles. He did not need to go to Jerusalem to receive authority; he possessed his authority by the direct call and *revelation of Jesus Christ*. This was the gospel he preached to the Galatians. This was the gospel from which some of them had defected. This was the only true gospel. It bore the sovereign authority of a gracious, loving and holy God. How could they, then, be so foolish as to separate themselves unto *another gospel*?

After Paul's statement certifying his gospel, Paul continued to tell the Galatians of his past life. He told them that after he returned from Arabia to Damascus, he went up to Jerusalem:

In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me: and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands. (II Corinthians 1:32-33)

Paul had preached to the Jews in Damascus before he went into Arabia, but when he returned, the Scriptures say that he had increased in strength. Thus he had increased in his understanding of the truth of the gospel. When he preached in Damascus, at his return from Arabia, he *confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ*. This

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

produced so much animosity, as we have seen, that he was forced to flee the city over the wall.

So he wrote:

... I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother. Now the things which I write unto you, before God, I lie not. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia; and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judaea which were in Christ: but they had heard only, That he which persecuted us in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed. And they glorified God in me. (Galatians 1:18-24)

Thus Paul related to the Galatians the historical events surrounding his salvation; his call to preach; his education in the truth of the gospel in Arabia; his visit to Damascus; his flight from Damascus; and his visit to Jerusalem (for fifteen days) three years after his salvation. Paul showed by the personal references to his life and experiences that the gospel he preached was not after man. He had not received it of man. He had received it from Jesus Christ.

To further emphasize his position, Paul continued relating his personal history. Even so he left some things out which are recorded elsewhere. He did not tell the Galatians of his escape from Jerusalem at the end of the fifteen-day visit. It was unnecessary to relate the confrontation with the Grecian Jews who sought to kill him. It was also unnecessary to tell them of his trip to Caesarea and then to Tarsus in Cilicia (where he remained for about ten years). He simply told the Galatians he was in the regions of Cilicia and Syria. Neither did Paul tell of returning to Syria with Barnabas and the whole year he spent there, preaching to both Jews and Gentiles; but he told them of his visit to Jerusalem at the end of that year, which was fourteen years after his salvation; and he told them of the revelation of the prophet Agabus, which led to his second visit to Jerusalem after his salvation. The information which he deleted was not essential to his purpose. It was not directly related to the establishment of his authority. However his visit to Jerusalem

Do I Now Persuade Men or God?

immediately before his first missionary journey into Asia was significant, and we shall consider it in greater detail in our next chapter.