*“Such A Deal”*

Paul’s Letter to the Galatians

Chapter 2

**“Got Change?”**

I

t’s a challenge to keep pace with the gush of changes in technology. Picture this .. you’re back-spacing yourself right out of retirement, needing to buff up your scrawny “201K” nest egg. You’re leaving the office late on your first day when you spot the CEO at the shredder holding a piece of paper. “Hey, how ‘bout a little help here," he says, "this is a very important original document, but my secretary’s left. Can you make this thing work?"

"Certainly," you reply, eager to impress. You flip on the machine, insert the paper, and press Start. "Excellent!" says the CEO as his paper disappears inside the machine. "I just need one copy."

Peter and Paul are the first marquee names who take Jesus’ message to the world. Peter, a “Deadliest Catch” type, is sent by God to his fellow Jews. Paul, a Jewish brainiac/activist, to Gentiles. Paul’s letter to believers in Galatia (Turkey) is all about change.

Becoming a Christ-follower has always come by *faith* in what Jesus has done for us (Romans 4:1-25). Paul’s New Testament letters add “the rest of the story” to Peter’s message. It’s what the risen Jesus discloses only to Paul, called “the mystery” and “the secret” since God had kept it mum from before Creation (Romans 16:25-27). Not available in stores, the Old Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke or John.

 ***The Secret’s Out***

***Galatians 2:1-5***

In biblical parlance, legalism is the notion that God dispenses *salvation* based on our religious *performance*. **Paul lands on this with vigor as we read now in Galatians 2:1-21 (p 865, NIV).**

Curious to see the new freedom enjoyed by Gentile believers, some of the Jerusalem Christ-followers had gone to Antioch in Syria to submarine what Paul’s teaching (Acts 15:1-35). Sensing that it’s time to sort out their differences face-to-face, Paul leaves Antioch to meet with Peter, James (Jesus’ half-brother) and John -- leaders of the new Christian movement. Paul explains what Jesus had told him to tell Gentiles about the implications of His recent mission to earth:

• Paul says Jesus is the only Sacrifice God would accept in order to pardon all sinners once for all time (2 Corinthians 5:17-21; Romans 4:8, 8:1). Unlike Peter, Paul did *not* preach “Repent and be baptized to get forgiven.” No, Paul said, “Your sins have *already*  been paid for IN FULL!” God chose Paul, the self-confessed “chief of sinners,” to take the Gospel to the Gentiles, dropping all human performance requirements for salvation. Even so, some still insist that repentance, faith and water baptism are pre-requisites for salvation. Heirloom customs are not easily dropped, making the transition from “Kingdom gospel” to “Grace gospel” bumpy for some.

• At the Feast of Pentecost Peter preaches “the Kingdom gospel” to out-of-towners who’d come to Jerusalem. Powered by the Holy Spirit, the disciples speak God’s message in languages the visitors understood, but the speakers did not (Acts 2:1-18). Peter promises that a wholesale *mea culpa* would rush Jesus back to *earth* to set up His kingdom,” promised long ago in prophecy (Acts 3:17-21). But Paul looks *ahead* to when Jesus returns in the *air* to take believers to be with Him always (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). One focuses on Christ’s return to *earth*, the other in the *air*. Two separate, future events, but often mistakenly combined as “the second coming.”

• Paul’s point is that, by faith alone, every believer is secure “in Christ.” We can *do* nothing to earn being totally right with God (Romans 3:20-24; Ephesians 2:8-9). But the more rigid, 1st century Pharisee converts to Christ *add* that to be “born again,” you must be circumcised and observe the laws and traditions of the Hebrew faith. But Paul wouldn’t budge from “Salvation = Faith + Nothing.” Had he given in, we’d still be in a performance-based struggle to please God.

Had God not sent Paul with the “mystery,” “the Day of the Lord” and Armageddon would’ve been next in God’s plan to punish sin (Acts 2:16-41). But God stepped into *time*, inserting this current *age of grace* (Ephesians 3:1-12; Romans 10:16-11:24).

**DISCUSS: Why would God keep “the mystery” a mystery?**

***Two Audiences, One Savior***

***Galatians 2:6-10***

As heady as it must have been to return to Jerusalem and meet with Peter, the guy who’d walked on the water, and to see James, Jesus’ half-brother, Paul hangs tough with “the gospel of the uncircumcision” which Jesus had personally told him to preach. And Peter & Company stand firm on their “gospel of the circumcision” which Jesus had charged him to take to the Jews. Both sides fist-bump, affirming their respective marching orders. Neither is more right than the other since, like a changing tide, the Gospel was moving through this incremental transition.

**DISCUSS: Sometimes we change when faced with new truth, peer pressure, exhaustion or deception. How do you know when to change? (Matthew 10:16, 1 Corinthians 2:15-16, Colossians 3:1-17, James 4:17)**

 ***Petered Out***

***Galatians 2:11-14***

Testing his new “freedom,” Peter hangs with non-Jews in Antioch. But his Jerusalem homies show up, so he sheds Gentiles like a bad suit, returning to “his people” (Acts 10:1-48; Ephesians 2:14-22).

**DISCUSS: Define *hypocrite*. How does God deal with them?**

 (Matthew 12:15, 23-28; Luke 12:1; John 6:36-37; Romans 5:6-10)

***“Dead Men” Walking***

***Galatians 2:15-21***

Jesus has done all the heavy lifting to save us. This sinless One allowed *all* our sins to be dumped on Him, satisfying God’s just decree that “whoever sins must die.” In effect, our sin nature (our *old man*, as Paul puts it) *died with Christ* at His crucifixion (2 Corinthians 5:17-18). My old man is dead! If that’s your experience too, then so’s your old man! This new man is declared by God to be perfect in His sight, even though it takes time for the new man’s exterior to sync up with what God says is true of him inside (Romans 3:20-28, 6:14, 7:21-8:1, 12:1-2; Colossians 1:22).

Satan, using Guilt (picture Snidely Whiplash), whispers in your ear, “Hey, sucker, don’t you know forgiveness ain’t free? You gotta keep all those rules, all the holy days, rituals, traditions and fork over all your hard-earned bread. Then maybe some day you’ll be worthy of God’s smile, and maybe even admission to heaven. But don’t count on it. Now get busy, and for God’s sake, *look* religious!”

But instead of being motivated by pride or guilt, Christ’s Holy Spirit in us energizes the believer to overflow with good works because we *want* to, not because we *have* to (Romans 7:6; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Philippians 2:13; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; Titus 2:11-14, 3:14).

**DISCUSS: What has God invested in you? Why did He?**

(2 Corinthians 8:9, 9:6-8)

***“Who Do You Trust?”***

Of all the questions ever thrown at you, this one has more riding on it by far. Why? Because never-ending heaven and hell are at stake.

Re where you’ll spend eternity, are you trusting in yourself or in what Christ did for you? Can you say with Paul, “My sins are buried right where Christ left them, in the grave (Colossians 2:13-23, 3:1-3)? What you see is a man under construction to become all that God has designed me to be” (Romans 8:29). If that could be done any other way than through the price Jesus paid in your place, then His tortuous death was a cruel waste and a heartless hoax.

*“I shall see Him face to face, praising God for by His grace*

*All my sin has been erased through the blood of Jesus.*

*The only view God has of me is through the blood of Jesus.”*

Is this Truth prompting you to make a change? If so, you could, right now, silently agree with God that Jesus shredded your sins and buried them forever. You’re totally forgiven! Now, by faith, invite God to make you the new man that He lovingly designed you to be.

His Deal

December 8 & 15, 2009

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