

Paul stood firm in maintaining the clarity of the gospel. He did so for the sake of his gentile friends and the future of the Christian church. He rejected the teaching of the 'false brothers' and pushed the Jerusalem-leaders into stating the gospel more clearly. He did it so that gentile Christians should have the joyful assurance of salvation that is part-and-parcel of the gospel. There was total agreement. The Jerusalem leaders did not want Paul to change in any way at all. *'And as for those who were recognized as being important – whatever they were at one time makes no difference to me; God does not take into account anything external – those who were recognized leaders contributed nothing to me'* ¹.

¹ 2:6

1. Authority depends on the spiritual power we have now, not upon our reputation

1. Authority depends on the spiritual power we have now, not upon our reputation. Paul makes a passing comment in his long sentence. 'Whatever they were at one time makes no difference to me; God does not take into account anything external.' Paul is wanting to work with the church-leaders at Jerusalem and even help them. But he makes it clear that he does not regard them as having superior authority to him. He also regards them as being supremely important at an **earlier** stage in the work of the church. 'Whatever they were **at one time** makes no difference to me...' Some new things are happening. Gentiles are being brought to salvation. Paul knows that the new things that are happening are just as important as what happened more than ten years previously when Peter had preached on the day of Pentecost. Actually it does not matter what we were in the past. It only matters what we are now. Paul will not allow anyone to act in a superior manner because of what they were in a **past** era, or because of their reputation. And he will not allow himself to feel inferior because he was not there on the day of Pentecost or because of his lack of any great reputation in Jerusalem. It is spiritual reality that counts – nothing else.

• *New things are happening*

• *What we are now is what matters*

2. Our true calling should become obvious

2. Our true calling should become obvious. Paul says, *'But on the contrary, when they saw that I had been trusted with the gospel for the uncircumcised people, just as Peter was trusted with the gospel for the circumcised people'* ¹ – *for he who worked through Peter bringing into being an apostolic ministry to circumcised people also worked through me to bring into being an apostolic ministry for the gentiles* ² – *and when they got to know the grace that had been given to me, then James and Cephas and John, who were recognized as "pillars" in the church, gave to me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, intending that we should go to the gentiles, but they should go to the circumcised people'* ³.

¹ 2:7

² 2:8

³ 2:9

• *Recognition of each one's call -the same message but in different situations*

The result of the discussion was that the various groups recognized the call of God upon the lives of each one of them. Paul and his friends had a ministry to gentiles. Peter and the Jerusalem people had a ministry to Jews. The grace of God was obvious in the lives of both groups. They could and did recognize each other as both having a powerful ministry from God. They both preached the same message,

• *Being true to ourselves*

• *Lessons for new endeavours*

3. Christian leaders in different situations should be ready to help each other

• *Seeing the need & being ready to respond*

but they were ministering in different situations. There are important lessons for us here. When we find our own calling we are not to be intimidated by the ‘superiority’ of other people. Nor is Christian ministry to be ‘standardised’ as if we all have to be the same as each other! We are more likely to achieve something for God if we are true to ourselves than if we try to copy other people.

The church of the Lord Jesus Christ needs new endeavours all the time. There was once a time when the church was only interested in reaching Jews ^{¶1}, but someone had the boldness to reach those who seemed to be unreachable ^{¶2}. When there is a new movement like this the older Christians tend to feel rather threatened. But we must not let this disturb us. Our task is to be true to ourselves, to follow God’s ‘revelations’ of His will, and to go ahead without letting others bully us. If we can take action so as to stay in fellowship with other ministries, then we should do what we can to maintain the unity of fellowship among Christian workers, and God will be pleased with us.

3. Christian leaders in different situations should be ready to help each other. There was one thing the Jerusalem Christians asked from Paul. ‘*Only they asked that we should remember the poor; which very thing I had been eager to do*’ ^{¶1}. The Jewish Christians of Jerusalem needed help, and Paul was ready to arrange for the gentile churches to do something for them. ‘Whoever has this world’s goods and sees his brother or sister in need, and closes his heart from him, how does the love of God remain in that person?’ ^{¶2}. Even at the time Paul was present with the leaders in Jerusalem as one who was helping the Jerusalem Christians in this way (for I link this passage with Acts 11:29–30). He had not yet launched the great ‘Relief Fund’, which he mentions in his letters to the Romans and Corinthians. But it was already on his heart. There was an obvious need. Paul had seen the situation for himself. He treated the Jerusalem Christians as his brothers and sisters, and was ready to do what he could for them. Christian unity in the gospel begins with doctrine! It is likely to end up affecting our finances!

¶1 see Acts 11:19

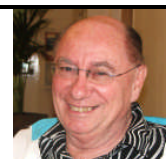
¶2 see Acts 11:20

¶1 2:10

¶2 3:17



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