

# The Gospel According to Paul: Romans

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## **Plans to Visit Jerusalem**

*But now I am going to Jerusalem to minister to the saints.<sup>26</sup>For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.<sup>27</sup>It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.<sup>28</sup>Therefore, when I have performed this and have sealed to them this fruit, I shall go by way of you to Spain.<sup>29</sup>But I know that when I come to you, I shall come in the fullness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.*

Here Paul expresses his most immediate plans, which are to go to Jerusalem with the contribution collected from the churches of Macedonia and Greece for the relief of the famine difficulties experienced by the Jerusalem church. Here he says concerning those who gave the money as a gift to the Jerusalem brethren, “they (the Gentiles) are their (the Jews) debtors. For if the Gentiles have been partakers of their (the Jews) spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things,” (15:27).

What were the spiritual things of the Jews, concerning which the Gentiles were debtors? These, as Paul had stated earlier, were (1) the monotheistic concept of God, (2) the Scriptures (the Oracles of God), (3) the identity and nature of God, (4) the moral teachings of Judaism (i.e., the Two Tablets or Ten Commandments), (5) the concept of the dignity of man as a being created in the image of God, and (6) the messianic expectation which was fulfilled in the coming of God into the world in the person and presence of Jesus of Nazareth. Without the Jews, these would have forever remained

hidden from the whole of mankind, as Paul expressed at the outset of this letter in Rom 1:18- 32.

### **Paul and James**

*Now I beg you, brethren, through the Lord Jesus Christ, and through the love of the Spirit, that you strive together with me in prayers to God for me,<sup>31</sup> that I may be delivered from those in Judea who do not believe, and that my service for Jerusalem may be acceptable to the saints,<sup>32</sup> that I may come to you with joy by the will of God, and may be refreshed together with you.<sup>33</sup> Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.*

Here we come to Paul's concern over the Jerusalem church's acceptance of the gift from the churches of Macedonia and Greece. There was, without question, a tension between those associated with the church in Jerusalem and Paul. This tension can be seen early on in the reaction of some of the Jewish Christians of Jerusalem to Paul's teachings in the region of Galatia. This tension becomes a confrontation between Paul and Barnabas and those of the Jerusalem church, following Paul and Barnabas' return from the Cyprus-Galatians mission (Acts 13-14). Acts 15:1-2 says,

*Some men came down from Judea to Antioch and were teaching the brothers: "Unless you are circumcised, according to the custom taught by Moses, you cannot be saved." <sup>2</sup>This brought Paul and Barnabas into sharp dispute and debate with them. So Paul and Barnabas were appointed, along with some other believers, to go up to Jerusalem to see the apostles and elders about this question.*

In Acts 15:5 we read, "Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to obey the Law of Moses." This controversy was addressed by Peter, Paul, the other apostles, and the elders of the Jerusalem church (15:6-31). Later, Paul went back to Galatia, and was followed by Peter. There a controversy erupted between Paul and Peter over Peter's inconsistent behavior in his association with the Gentile Christians. Paul refers to this conference in Jerusalem and also comments on his conflict with Peter. In 2:4-10 he refers to the Jerusalem meeting,

*This matter arose because some false brothers had infiltrated our*

ranks to spy on the freedom we have in Christ Jesus and to make us slaves. <sup>5</sup>We did not give in to them for a moment, so that the truth of the gospel might remain with you. <sup>6</sup>As for those who seemed to be important--whatever they were makes no difference to me; God does not judge by external appearance--those men added nothing to my message. <sup>7</sup>On the contrary, they saw that I had been entrusted with the task of preaching the gospel to the Gentiles, just as Peter had been to the Jews.<sup>1</sup> <sup>8</sup>For God, who was at work in the ministry of Peter as an apostle to the Jews, was also at work in my ministry as an apostle to the Gentiles. <sup>9</sup>James, Peter and John, those reputed to be pillars, gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship when they recognized the grace given to me. They agreed that we should go to the Gentiles, and they to the Jews. <sup>10</sup>All they asked was that we should continue to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.

Then in Verses 11-16, he refers to his conflict with Peter,

*When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. <sup>12</sup>Before certain men came from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles. But when they arrived, he began to draw back and separate himself from the Gentiles because he was afraid of those who belonged to the circumcision group. <sup>13</sup>The other Jews joined him in his hypocrisy, so that by their hypocrisy even Barnabas was led astray. <sup>14</sup>When I saw that they were not acting in line with the truth of the gospel, I said to Peter in front of them all, "You are a Jew, yet you live like a Gentile and not like a Jew. How is it, then, that you force Gentiles to follow Jewish customs? <sup>15</sup>"We who are Jews by birth and not 'Gentile sinners' <sup>16</sup>know that a man is not justified by observing the law, but by faith in Jesus Christ. So we, too, have put our faith in Christ Jesus that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by observing the law, because by observing the law no one will be justified.*

### **What Do We Make of These Matters?**

Even during the age of miracles, people had problem with themselves and with others. Apostles could and did disagree. Barnabas, who was himself a miracle worker (Acts 14:3), disagreed with Paul over John Mark.

Churches, even first century churches during the apostolic period, had

problems with one another. The Jerusalem church was not a “Mother Church,” as some church historians refer to it. This was a congregation of Jewish Christians trying to live in consistency with their belief in Jesus of Nazareth as the Messiah, and, at the same time, continue their Jewish traditionalism. Else, why the recommendation to Paul concerning the purification vow (Acts 21:17-26), and why the reference to the many believers who zealous for the *Torah* in Acts 21:20?

### **Paul and the Law**

It is clear from what Paul said in Galatians, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and in Romans, that he believed that Christ had fulfilled the purpose of the Law and a new covenant had been set in place. Because of this, Gentiles were not amenable to the Law, and, in Paul’s thinking, neither were the Jews. If a Jewish Christian wished to observe his Jewish traditions, if they were not in conflict with the teachings of Jesus, then he considered them optional. This is clear from what he says in 1 Cor 9:20-21,

*To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup>To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law.*

James had made it clear in his letter to the Gentiles in Acts 15:27-29, that the Gentiles were not amenable to the Law,

*We have heard that some went out from us without our authorization and disturbed you, troubling your minds by what they said. <sup>25</sup>So **we all agreed** to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul-- <sup>26</sup>men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>27</sup>Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing. <sup>28</sup>It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us **not to burden you with anything beyond the following requirements:** <sup>29</sup> You are to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality. You will do well to avoid these things. Farewell.*

Some argue that this was a binding of the covenant made with Noah (Gen 9:3-4), but this only concerns eating blood. Others argue that it is a subtle binding of the kosher laws of Lev 17-18, but this text saying nothing about *eidolothuton* (idolatry). Idolatry is forbidden in the first three of the ten commandment (Exodus 20), and fornication (*porneia*) is forbidden in the 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of the commandments. James and the other Jerusalem elders were telling the Gentiles that they were to follow the monotheistic instructions of commandments one through three, and commandments seven and ten as relates to their sexual behavior.

### Conclusion

Even though Paul, in 1 Cor 9, instructs the Gentiles not to eat meat polluted by sacrifice to idols, he says that the reason is that it may be offensive to those who believe it to be the equivalent of idolatry. Paul did not follow this letter of James and the Jerusalem elders “to the letter” in his Gospel to the Gentiles; and, what-is-more, he did not teach the Jews of the Diaspora that they were still under the *Torah*. In fact, he taught just the opposite. James and the other elders of the Jerusalem church would have found themselves at odds with Paul here. To be free from the law of Moses and bound only to the law of Christ was something the Jews of the Jerusalem church would have had great difficulty accepting. As James and the elders say in their meeting in Acts 21,

*Then they said to Paul: "You see, brother, how many thousands of Jews have believed, and all of them are zealous for the law. <sup>21</sup>They have been informed that you teach all the Jews who live among the Gentiles to turn away from Moses, telling them not to circumcise their children or live according to our customs. (Acts 21:20-21).*

Would Paul have told the Jewish Christians of Galatia, Corinth, Rome, or Ephesus that they must circumcise their male children and live according to the customs of Judaism? That they were to be zealous for the *Torah* in such matters as observing *kosher* dietary laws, or wearing a *tallit* when they prayed or read from the Scriptures in the synagogue, or that they were to have a *minyan* of ten men (sons of the covenant) before they could assemble for prayer and *tanakh* reading? Would he have insisted that they observe the Sabbath from Friday evening to Saturday evening in their homes and in the synagogue and that they were to observe all the Jewish Feast Days? Would he have instructed them that they were to continue to avoid

calling God *Elohim* or *Theos*? Would he have insisted that Jewish Christians avoid touching a corpse and if they did they would have to be ritually purified, or that a woman was unclean during her monthly period, or that a child born out of wedlock was to be classified as a *mamzer* and not be allowed to enter the assemblies? If Paul had been consistent with what he wrote in 1 Cor 8-9, Romans 4-7 and the whole letter to the Galatians, he would not have insisted that anyone be zealous in keeping the Law of Moses. If the Jewish Christians so desired, they may keep many of their traditional practices; but if they chose to cease following Jewish customs altogether, Paul would not have told them that they must because such was a matter of faith to them as Jews.

It does appear that even within first century Christianity, matters of faith were difficult to determine and agree upon. What some would consider a belief essential to faithfulness to Christ, others did not consider essential at all; in fact, this study is a case in point. James and Paul did not appear to agree on the essentiality of keeping the Law of Moses for those Jews who believed in Jesus as the Messiah. Because of this, it was not expedient for them to be a part of the same community of believers. This difference eventually led to a separation of many Jewish Christians into a separation of communities of belief; e.g., the Ebionites, the Nasarenes, some groups of Jewish Gnostics, and, perhaps, some early stage Kabbalistic groups.

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