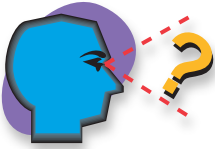


Galatians



Responses to the Questions



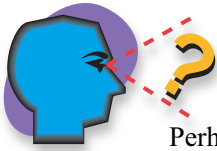
NOTE: BE SURE TO RESPOND TO ALL THE QUESTIONS YOURSELF BEFORE READING THESE RESPONSES IN ORDER TO MAKE THE MOST OF THIS STUDY

PAUL'S GOSPEL ENDORSED

Gal. 2:1-10

1. Paul says it was a “revelation” that convinced him to go up to Jerusalem again. We don’t know if it was a revelation made to him or someone else, but it was clear that God wanted him to resolve the problem by laying it before those in authority in Jerusalem (as we saw in Acts 15).
2. When Paul acknowledges that without the approval of those in authority in Jerusalem, his work among the Gentiles would be “in vain,” he is making a simple but powerful statement about apostolic authority and the unity of the Church. Even though he personally had no doubt about the validity of the gospel he preached, he knew that the public blessing and agreement of those in visible positions of apostolic authority were necessary to keep the Church from breaking into Jewish and Gentile factions. Jewish Christians needed to be assured that the leaders in Jerusalem approved of preaching a gospel that did not require converts to be circumcised. Peter and the apostles had been given the authority “to bind” and “to loose” in the Church. These were terms very familiar to Jews, for they were common rabbinic terms for the authority of the rabbi to determine what Scripture would allow and what it would forbid. So, for Paul, the authority to preach the gospel was grounded in the revelation he had of Jesus *and* his approval by the apostles in Jerusalem. It was not one or the other, but both.
3. Titus, Paul’s companion, was a Gentile convert. It could well have been Paul’s intention to make a “test case” out of Titus by taking him along to the meeting in Jerusalem. Once and for all, the relationship between Gentile Christians and circumcision needed to be faced directly, and the presence of Titus there would have been the perfect occasion.
4. Clearly this was a question over which passions had become enflamed. And it was being approached in a way that brought out the worst in some people. It is important for us not to lose sight of the heat of emotion and conviction that this problem generated. If we water down the difference of opinions here, we will lose the impact of how a *magisterial* system of arriving at truth, as practiced by the New Testament church and in the Catholic Church today, can preserve unity among Christians where powerful forces are always at work to prevent it.
5. Paul can make a distinction between a reputation and a role. We can surmise that the Twelve Apostles, because of their closeness and intimacy with Jesus for three years, had a reputation as being special. Even within the Twelve, there was Peter, who was the leader, and John, who had been loved by Jesus in a singular way. Paul cares not for the reputation of those in Jerusalem, only that they had been picked to exercise authority. He is confident that God doesn’t show partiality among His people and doesn’t assign them roles according to their reputations but according to His grace. Undoubtedly, some who disagreed with Paul’s position on circumcision accused him of not being on the same level with the other apostles who had known Jesus during His earthly life.





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

Perhaps that is why Paul is so ready to discount reputations and stay focused on the call of God that comes by grace and the authority that comes through office, not reputation.

6. The apostles perceived that Paul preached the true gospel, the very same one that Peter was preaching to the Jews, and that God had given him grace in his life. What do these really mean? They mean that Paul both *preached* and *lived* the truth of God, in the grace of God. Apostolic teaching always holds those two together that way—the truth of the gospel is to be believed and lived. It will not be one without the other, not even for the great apostle Paul. When those in authority perceived these things in him, they confirmed him as one of their own, won over by his credible message and credible life. They gave their stamp of approval to his conviction that Gentile converts were not to be circumcised.

7. The apostles wanted Paul to remember the poor, and it is clear that this was uppermost in his mind, too. Concern in the church for the needs of the poor springs directly from the many sayings of Jesus concerning the poor, the outsider, the disenfranchised. From its beginning, the Church has manifested this same regard for addressing human needs. Faith in the gospel to obtain redemption and obedience to the gospel's call to love our neighbor cannot be separated. It might have been the case that the apostles, concerned by the possibility that some might misunderstand salvation by faith to mean that it was faith *alone*, reminded Paul about this concrete way to live by faith. In this particular case, Paul's eagerness to help the poor in the Jerusalem church may well have been fanned by his deep desire for unity among Jewish and Gentile converts. The church in Jerusalem was filled primarily with Jewish converts. The churches established by Paul were in Gentile territory. For the Gentile Christians to provide monetary support for their Jewish brothers in need would be a public demonstration of the unity that is to characterize the Body of Christ.

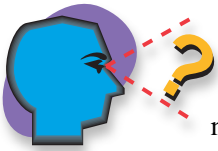
8. Answers will vary. Catholics who have a call to ministry or apostolates always need to have the approval of their priests or bishops. It is not the Catholic way to feel a call from God and then start a ministry without coming under the supervision of those in authority, even if the reputations of those men do not overwhelm us. In fact, some who hold the office of bishop or priest are unworthy, but the authority of their office is still binding on us anyway. It is profoundly good for our souls to be obedient even to unworthy shepherds, for not only does humility grow in us, but we are in deep fellowship with Jesus in those moments, who was obedient unto death at the hands of very unworthy shepherds.

PAUL CONFRONTS PETER **Gal. 2:11-14**

9. Paul observed Peter behaving in a hypocritical manner during a visit he made in Antioch. "Certain men from James" refers to a group of Jewish Christians, probably from the Church in Jerusalem, where James was the elder, who quite possibly still had some reservations about not circumcising Gentile converts. Before their arrival, Peter had eaten freely with the Gentiles (the Mosaic code forbade Jews eating with the "uncircumcised"). When they appeared in Antioch, Peter began withdrawing from the Gentiles, possibly because he didn't want to antagonize the Jewish Christians and stir up old animosities. Paul could see what a threat this was to the truth of the gospel and to the unity of the Church.

10. Peter's insincerity had been committed in public, and, because of his stature as leader of the Church, it had a powerful effect on other Christians (see that even Barnabas was carried away). Paul knew that this had to be addressed in public, to undo the harm that had been done and to prevent it from spreading. Notice that there was





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

no rebuttal from Peter. The controversy did not get revisited here. There was no need to come up with another truth about whether to make Gentile converts become Jews. Peter didn't take a group that thought and acted like him off to form their own fellowship or church. Paul simply challenged Peter on his hypocrisy. He didn't accuse Peter of teaching something new and different from what had been declared at the Council of Jerusalem. He only wanted Peter to live in line with that truth. St. Augustine comments: "He who was rebuked was worthier of admiration and more difficult to imitate than he who made the rebuke [...]. This episode serves as a fine example of humility, the greatest of Christian teachings, because it is through humility that charity is maintained" (*Exp. In Gal*, 15)

11. Jesus knew, in a very direct and personal way, Peter's weakness and fallibility. When He handed over the keys of the kingdom to Peter (see Matt. 16:13-20), was it because of Peter's sanctity? No, it was because God had revealed to Peter an earth-shattering truth: the true identity of Jesus. It wasn't through "flesh and blood" that Peter knew this truth. Peter's leadership of the Church was anchored in the charism of truth he received from God, not in who he was or how free from sin he was. Some people find it hard to imagine that God's pure and undefiled truth can come through a fallible, sinful man. But this was not the attitude of Jesus, who, when speaking to His disciples about just such a situation, said: "The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you. But do not do what they do, for they do not practice what they preach" (Matt. 23:2-3). The problem here was not whether sinful men can teach the truth, because Jesus shows that if sinful men sit in a chair of divine authority ("the seat of Moses"), they will teach what is true, by virtue of the office they hold. The problem is the bad example they set in their sinful and hypocritical behavior. That is precisely why Paul confronts Peter in Antioch.

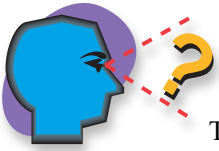
The Catholic Church teaches that Peter and his successors will be infallible in what they declare as dogma and morals, not because they are all holy men (we hope they are!), but because of the nature of God's gift of Truth. It will not contain errors, since God is Truth Himself. God takes full responsibility for protecting His Church from the onslaught of hell, which He accomplished by His own grace and not man's righteousness. Peter and all his successors have been fallible men who serve an infallible God. Catholic teaching on the papacy is not at all jeopardized by this incident.

12. In using terminology like this, Paul makes clear how deep the divide was between Jew and Gentile. Not only from the fact that the Mosaic code defined Gentiles as ritually unclean, but also from the way they practiced idolatry, Jews thought of Gentiles as being in a class all their own. The phrase, "Gentile sinners," is not so much a theological statement as a cultural one. Paul knew well that Jews were sinners, too. He uses the phrase to help him build his case that the cultural divide between Jew and Gentile is closed by a theological reality: both the ritually "clean" and "unclean" will be justified in precisely the same way—through faith in Christ Jesus.

13. The answer couldn't be clearer: no one will be justified through observance of the Mosaic code. There is only one way to obtain right standing with God, and that is through faith in Christ Jesus. That is why Gentiles who have faith in Christ do not need to become Jews, observing the Jewish ceremonial laws. Paul will spend much energy in the rest of this letter explaining why that is true.

14. It may be that here Paul is attempting to explain the danger of Peter's (Cephas) lapse without actually naming him. If one who believes that justification is by faith in Jesus, so that he lives like a Gentile does (without fears about ritual uncleanness) suddenly begins to go back to the Mosaic code, with its ritual requirements, he is implicitly suggesting that by belonging to Christ, he has become a sinner, that there is something unclean and sinful about living like a Gentile. In that scenario, Christ would be an agent of sin.





Responses to the Questions (cont.)

This idea horrifies Paul. To rebuild the elaborate Mosaic code and submit to it again would lead to this conclusion. It is to be avoided at all costs.

15. Paul says “through the law I died to the law, that I might live to God.” He means that if one expects to be pleasing to God by means of the Mosaic Law, he will be eternally thwarted. The law provides justification only for one who can keep it perfectly; one violation of any part of it brings not justification but condemnation (to be discussed in the next lesson). Breaking the law incurs death. Paul speaks of himself as having died the death that the law requires for breaking it. How did that happen? “I have been crucified with Christ,” he says. Here is the remarkable glory of the gospel: by faith and baptism, we are placed with Christ in the death He died for us, on our behalf. Justification comes not through the law but through the gift of God. Crucifixion and death aren’t simply graphic ways of illustrating a theological truth; they are the theological truths themselves.

16. This glorious spiritual reality, our death to the law and rising to new life, takes place during baptism. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, in baptism we have been placed in Christ, so that not only are we with Him in His death that the law demands, but we are with Him in His resurrection from that death. We, too, have “newness of life.” In the sacrament of baptism, the sinner goes under water, signifying a death and burial, and then comes out from under water, a wonderful rising from the dead. Notice here that rebirth is directly tied to baptism (see also 1 Pet. 3:21-22); all those baptized in the Lord Jesus are “born again.”

17. So thoroughly does Paul understand his new life in Christ to be a divine gift that he writes, “it is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” It is his way of emphasizing all that Christ accomplished in His redemptive act on the Cross. What we receive in baptism is the indwelling presence of Christ Himself in us. Truly a new life has begun. Paul sees this gift as a result of the personal love that Jesus had for him, a love so strong that it was willing to die for him.

18. If men could save themselves by keeping the Mosaic law, then Christ’s death was without purpose. The Son of God didn’t die for His own sin! If He died for men who didn’t really need Him to die, it was a foolish (and wasted) gesture. Grace, which is God’s unmerited favor, is nullified the moment we expect to be justified on the basis of our own actions.

19. Answers will vary. At first reading, many Catholics have a sneaking suspicion that Martin Luther was right all along—justification really is by faith alone. It looks as if good works just don’t fit into this picture that Paul has painted. As the epistle unfolds, however, we will see just how Catholic St. Paul was. No need to fear!

